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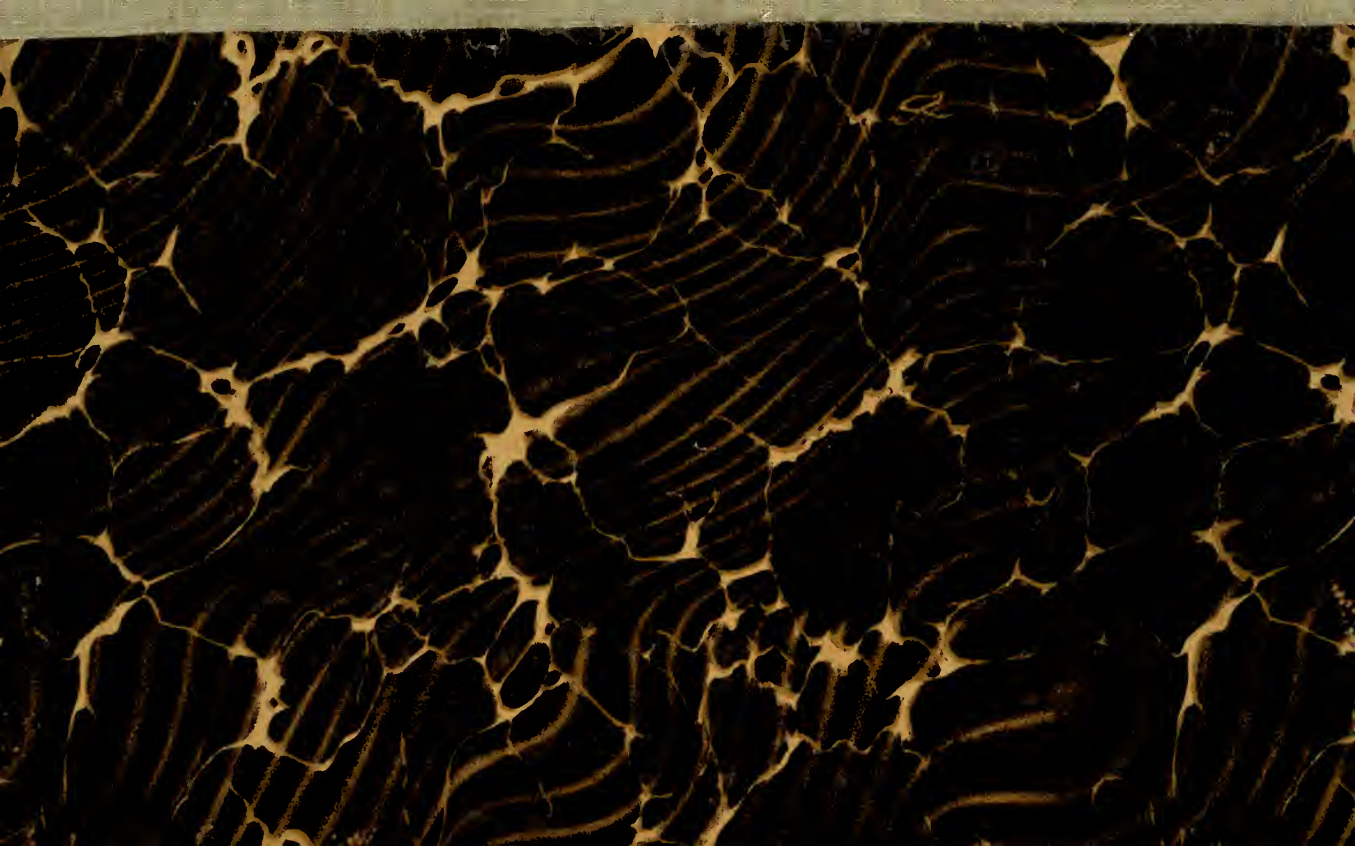

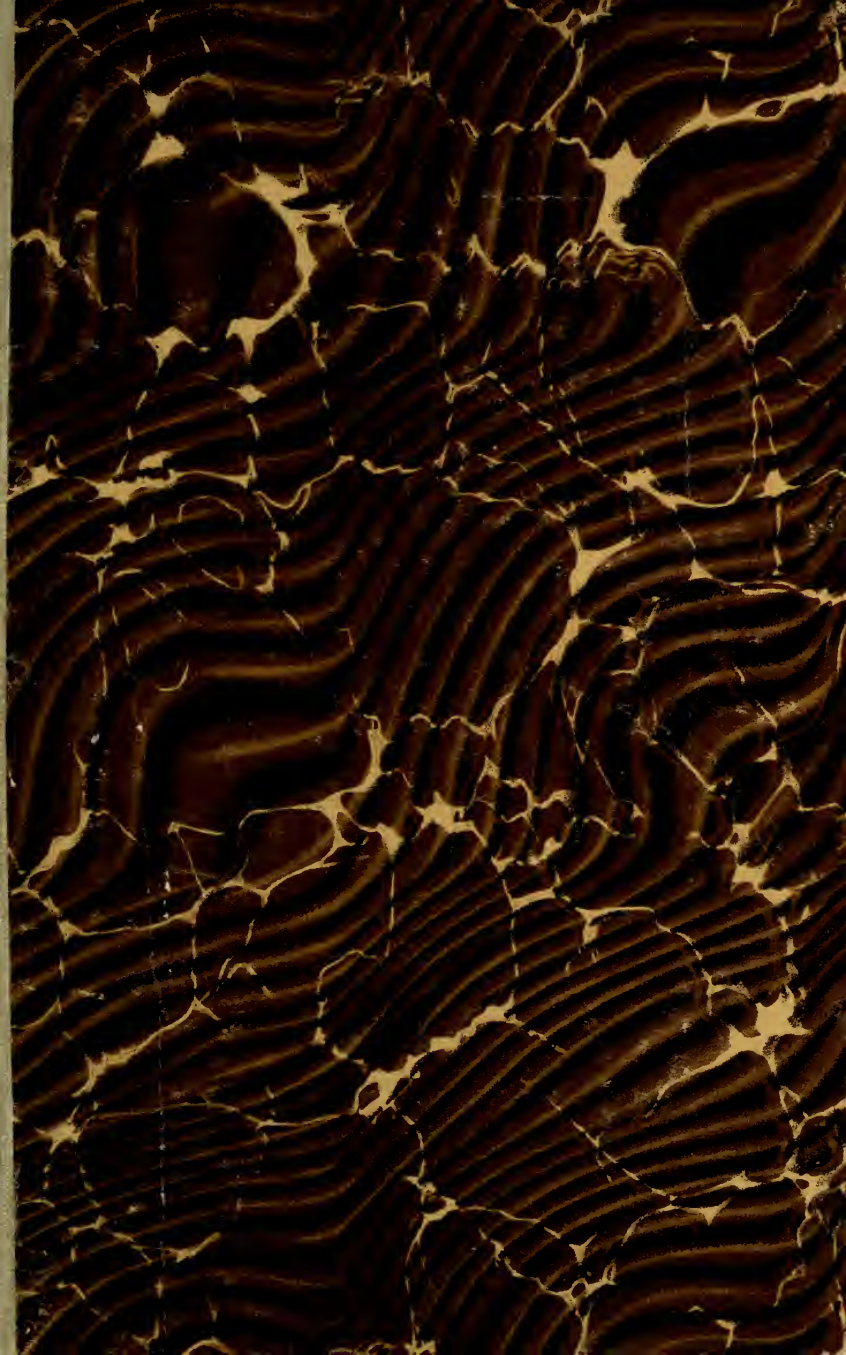

THE WESTERNERS

By

Stewart Edward White

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I

THE HALF-BREED

A TOURIST of to-day, peering from the window of his vestibule train at the electric-lit vision of Three Rivers, as it stars the banks of the Missouri like a constellation against the blackness of the night, would never recognize, in the trim little modern town, the old Three Rivers of the early seventies.

To restore the latter, he should first of all sweep the ground bare of the buildings which now adorn it, leaving, perhaps, here and there an isolated old shanty of boards far advanced toward dissolution. He would be called upon to substitute, in place of the brick stores and dwellings of to-day, a motley collection of lean-tos, dug-outs, tents, and shacks, scattered broadcast over the virgin prairie without the slightest semblance of order. Where the Oriole furniture factory now stands, he must be prepared to see—and hear—a great drove of horses and oxen feeding on bottom-land grass. And for the latter-day citizens, whose police record is so discouraging to the ambitious chief, and so creditable to themselves, he must imagine a multitude more heterogeneous, perhaps, than could be gathered anywhere else in the world—tenderfeet from the East; mountaineers from Tennessee and Kentucky, bearing their historic long pea rifles; soft-voiced Virginians; keen, alert woodsmen from the North; wiry, silent trappers and scouts from the West;

and here and there a straight Indian, stalking solemnly toward some one of the numerous "whiskey joints." The court-house site he would find crowded with canvas wagons, noisy with the shrill calling of women and children. Where Judge Oglethorpe has recently erected his stone mansion, Frank Byers would be running a well-patronized saloon. Were he to complete the picture by placing himself mentally at the exact period of our story's opening, he would find the whole town, if such it might be called, seething, turbulent, eager, and—it must be confessed—ready for trouble.

For all these varied swarms had gathered from three points of the compass for the purpose of pushing on to the gold discoveries of the Black Hills. They had rushed eagerly to this extremest point—and stopped. As far as the border of the great wilderness it was possible to journey individually; beyond that mysterious boundary nothing could be accomplished alone. Trained scouts and plainsmen there became necessary, and these skilled men declined to attempt the journey.

Their reasons were simple and cogent. Throughout all of the previous winter unusual snows had covered the pasturage to such a depth that much of the range stock, on which the plainsman relied to draw his heavy "schooners," had died of cold and exhaustion, while of the survivors but an insignificant remnant was fit to travel. After causing this damage, the snow had melted in four days, leaving the streams swollen, and the trails in an awful state, especially in the Bad Lands, where, in the deeper gullies, they must have been quite washed out. As an incidental climax, piled on top to make good measure, the Ogallalas were on the war-path; and of all the Sioux the Ogallalas are the worst.

Nobody gave a thought to the Ogallalas. That was part of the game. But a blind man could see that those emaciated cattle couldn't stand the racket. And so Three Rivers steadily congested, and the conditions of life daily became more exacting.

One of the many who had reached the frontier town, only to find himself checked in his desire to push ahead, was a young man of twenty-two or three. He had made a long journey, and he was correspondingly disappointed when he foresaw, as his immediate prospect, a summer's sojourn in a sun-baked, turbulent, unprofitable region. Not that he was content with a superficial proof of its necessity. He sought the preventing causes at the very sources of them: he examined the cattle carefully; he questioned closely the men who knew the trails, the fords, the Indians. When he had quite finished his patient investigations, he swore briefly and gustily, and then went on a three-days' spree, from which he sobered into a quiet cigarette-smoking lounger, waiting for what might turn up. Nothing did.

The days followed one another until a month had passed, which seemed as long as a year. Men gambled away one another's small store of wealth, drank away their own disappointments, shot each other's lives out unmolested. Three spasmodic vigilance committees hanged six men by the neck until they were dead, but speedily allowed themselves to dissolve and the town to relapse, because of a happy combination of sheer laziness and sympathy with the offenders.

Rumors of an advance flew thick. They were always brought heavily to earth by a charge of common-sense or investigation. Nevertheless, others were speedily

on the wing; and men looked at them. Ensuing disappointment came in time to possess a cumulative force that amounted to a dull, sullen anger against nothing in particular.

The young man of whom mention has already been made, took his month with an outward seeming of imperturbability, but with an increasing inner tension. He was a tall, dark, straight young man, broad-shouldered and clean built; strong, but with fine hands and feet. His hair was straight and black; his features clean-cut and swarthy. By his restless eye and a certain indefinable cast of expression you knew him for a half-breed. He gave out his name as Michaïl Lafond, and he lived much in himself. Toward the close of the troublous thirty days, a practised observer might have noticed that his slender fingers were rarely still. Otherwise the half-breed appeared the most indifferent member of the community.

His apparent idleness did not prevent him from investigating in his painstaking manner each rumor as it took form. This was the reason why, when finally the formation of a genuine train was undertaken by three of the specialists known as scouts, Michaïl Lafond was one of the earliest to know of it, and one of the first to apply for admission. He owned four strong little horses of mustang stock, and a light, two-wheeled wagon of the bob-tailed type. Most of his life had been spent in the great Northern wilderness. He was expert in his own kind of woodcraft, accustomed to hardships, and a good shot. In every respect he knew himself fitted to become a member of such an expedition as the present. He had no doubt of his acceptance. When he realized that at last his waiting was ended,

he saddled one of his horses, and rode three miles out on the lonely prairie, where he jumped up and down, shook his fists in the air, and screamed with delight. This was the half-breed of it. Impassibility may be stupid or intensely nervous. Then, all a-tremble, he rode back to where the three specialists in question were camped, just on the border of the town, and proffered his formal application.

The three to whom he addressed himself were practically at the head of their profession. It was not a profession of easy access, but one to which only a long and dangerous apprenticeship gave admittance. Its members were men who had lived their lives on the frontier, either as express riders, hunters, trappers, army scouts, or as members of the Indian tribes themselves. They were a hardy, bold, self-reliant race, equal to all emergencies, and exacting from the men in their charge the most implicit obedience. To their wonderful resourcefulness is due the fact that so many comparatively weak forces were enabled to penetrate in safety a hostile country teeming with the most treacherous and wily foes.

As with all crafts, they had their big men—the masters, as it were—whose deeds they emulated, whose feats of skill and divination they spoke of with awe, whose names they worshipped. Of such were Kit Carson, Wild Bill, Jim Clarke, Buffalo Bill, Slade, and the three men with whom we have to deal—Jim Buckley, Alfred, and Billy Knapp.

Billy Knapp was dark, tall, broad-shouldered, long-haired, wearing a bristly mustache and goatee. A stranger might have remarked his frowning, beetling brow with a little uneasiness, but would have taken

heart from the energetic kindliness of the eyes beneath. In fact, eager, autocratic energy was the dominant note in Billy's character. He succeeded because this energy carried him through—with some to spare.

Jim Buckley was also tall and large, but he gave one less the idea of nervous force than of a certain static power. He was a mass which moved slowly but irresistibly. His seal-brown beard, his broad forehead, the distance between his wide, steady eyes strengthened this impression. One felt that his decisions would be hardly come at, but stubbornly held. Success was inevitable, but it would be the result of slow thinking, deep purpose, and a quiet tenacity of grip that never let go.

As for Alfred—everybody has heard of him. His place in the annals of the West is assured, and his peculiarities of person and character have been many times described. Surely no one is unfamiliar with his short, bandy legs, his narrow, sloping little shoulders, his contracted chest, his queer pink and white face, with its bashful smile, his high bald head. Everybody knows his fear of women. Everybody knows, too, that he never had an opinion of his own on any subject. His speciality was making the best of other people's, no matter how bad they were; and competent judges say he could accomplish a more gloriously perfect best out of some tenderfoot's fool notion than another man with the advice of experts. Some people even maintain that Alfred was the best scout the plains ever produced, only he was so bashful that it took an expert to appreciate the fact.

When Lafond approached the camp of these men and threw himself from his pony, he found only Jim Buck-

ıey, sitting in the shade of one of his wagons, smoking his pipe.

"One says that you will tak' train through thees summer," began the half-breed abruptly. "Ah lak' to go also."

Buckley looked his interlocutor over keenly.

"Yes," said he slowly, between puffs. "That's right. We aims to pull through, but we don't aim to take no lumber with us. You married?"

Lafond shook his head. "No! No! No!" he cried vehemently.

"That's all right. Got any cattle?"

"Four horses."

"That one of them?"

"Yes."

The scout arose, still with the same appearance of deliberation, and inspected the pony thoroughly, with the eye and movements of an expert.

"Others as good?" he inquired.

"Bettaire," assured Lafond.

"Wagon?" pursued the laconic Buckley.

"Bobtail," responded Lafond with equal brevity. Though young, he already possessed some shrewdness in the reading of character.

Buckley sat down in the shade and relit his pipe.

"Where are you from?" he asked bluntly.

"Ontario."

"Woods?"

"Yes."

"Thought you wasn't no tenderfoot. Ever hit the trail?"

"Not on those plains. In the woods many times."

"We ain't takin' but damn few," went on Buckley

dissertatively, "and them that goes has to be right on to their job. No women; good cattle. That's our motto. Reckon you-all fills the bill. Cyan't tell. Got to ask the others."

Lafond knew that this, from a man of Buckley's stamp, was distinct encouragement. At the moment, the other two members came up. Buckley, in a few words, told them of the newcomer's desires and qualifications.

Billy looked him over briefly.

"Yo're a breed, ain't yo'?" he inquired with refreshing directness. "I thought so." He turned to Buckley, with the air of ignoring Lafond altogether. "That bars him," he said, with a little laugh.

"He's got a mighty good line of broncs," Buckley objected.

"Don't care if his hosses *are* good," stated Billy decidedly. "He's a breed, an' that's enough. I seen plenty of that crew, and I ain't goin' to have one in the same country with me, if I can help it, let alone the same outfit."

He began to whistle and rummage in the back of the wagon, with a charming obliviousness to the presence of the subject of his remarks.

"That settles it," said Buckley, curtly and indifferently.

The half-breed, his nervous hands deep in his side-pockets, walked slowly to his horse. Then, in sudden access of rapid motion, he leaped on the animal's back and disappeared.

II

THE WOMAN

BARELY had the dust of the half-breed's sudden departure sifted from the air, when Buckley arose and announced his intention of "taking a little look round." He was gone two hours, and returned looking solemn and earnest. Billy and Alfred were cooking things over a small fire. Buckley spat in a propitiatory manner toward seven small bushes, and conversationally informed the northwest corner of the canvas top on a nearby schooner that he, Jim Buckley, had decided to take along a woman.

Billy and Alfred thereupon spilled the coffee, and could not believe their ears.

"She's goin', if I have to take her by myself," Buckley concluded. And then Alfred and Billy looked up into his face, and saw that he was in earnest.

Alfred turned pink and wriggled the bacon, trying immediately to think how he was going to make the best of this. It did not look easy.

Billy Knapp exploded.

"You go to hell!" was his method of objection.

"She goes," repeated Jim, with even greater quietness of manner. "An' if you-all don' like it, why, jest say so. I quits. You got to have her, if you have me."

"I'd jest like to know why," complained Billy, a little sobered at this threat.

Whereupon Jim found himself utterly at a loss. He had not thought as far as that. He suddenly appre-

ciated the logical weakness of his position; but then, again, intuitively, he realized more subtly its strength. So he said not a word, but arose lightly, and brought unto them the woman herself.

She was a sweet little woman, with deep, trusting blue eyes, and she accompanied Jim without a thought of the opposition she had excited. Jim merely told her she was to meet the other two men. She intended only to show her appreciation of their kindness.

She approached the fire, and assumed her most gracious manner.

"I want to thank you both, as well as Mr. Buckley, for being so good to me," she began, with real feeling. "I know how hard it is for you to take me just now, and I appreciate it more than I can say. I don't know what we would have done. You need not be afraid that we shall be much trouble, for we will all be brave, and not murmur. Your goodness has made me very happy, and I am going to pray to God for you to-night," said the little Puritan with simple reverence. It meant a great deal to her.

Alfred, as usual, was wrigglingly shy. Billy Knapp several times opened his mouth to object, but somehow closed it slowly each time without having objected. The woman saw. She thought it meant that her presence embarrassed them both, so with true tact she wished them a gentle good-night, and went away.

The three looked at one another.

"Well?" asked Jim defiantly.

Billy coughed. He spat in the fire. He exploded. "Damn it! She goes!" he roared with the voice of a bull.

They both looked expectantly toward Alfred. Al-

fred nodded his head. He was wondering how long it had been since anyone had prayed for him.

"Thar is a man with her," remarked Jim, after a moment's silence. "He's a tenderfoot. And a kid. The kid has blue eyes, too," he added irrelevantly.

"The camp'll be mighty riled," put in Alfred.

"Let's go see the tenderfoot," suggested the practical Billy.

They dropped everything, and went over to the "hotel," where they viewed the woman's husband at a safe distance. He was a slight, bent man, with near-sighted eyes behind thick spectacles, straight, light hair, and a peering, abstracted expression of countenance. He wore a rather shiny frock coat.

"Gee Christmas!" ejaculated Billy, and laughed loudly.

Alfred shook his head.

Jim looked grave.

They returned to camp, and began to discuss the question of ways and means. There would surely be trouble when the affair became known. The inclusion of a tenderfoot from Chicago, on account of his pinto team, had almost resulted in a riot of the rejected. Not one of the three was fatuous enough to imagine for a moment that Jack Snowie, for instance, who had been refused because he wanted to take his wife, would exactly rejoice over the scouts' decision. In fact, Jack had a rather well-developed sense of injustice, and a summary method of showing it. And he was by no means alone.

Jim agreed to transport the three in his schooner, which was one point well settled. Billy suggested at least a dozen absurd methods of keeping the camp in

ignorance until the start had actually been made, each one of which was laughed to scorn by the practical Jim.

"She might put on men's clothes," he concluded desperately.

"For the love of God, what for?" inquired Jim. "Stick to sense, Billy. Besides, there's the kid."

Billy tried once more.

"They might meet us 'bout a hundred mile out. He could take Jim's schooner, here, and mosey out nor'-west, and then jest nat'rally pick us up after we gets good and started. That way, the camp thinks he palavers with Jim and us to get a schooner, and maybe they thinks Jim is a damn fool a whole lot, but Jim don't mind that; do you, Jim?"

"No, I don't mind that," said Jim, "but yore scheme's no good."

"Why?"

"He wouldn't get ten mile before somebody'd hold him up and lift his schooner off him. They's a raft of bad men jest layin' fer a chance like that to turn road agent."

Billy turned a slow brick-red, and got up suddenly, overturning the coffee-pot. A dozen strides brought him to the camp of the Tennessee outfit. There he raised his voice to concert pitch.

"We aims to pull out day arter to-morrow," he bellowed. "We also aims to take with us two tenderfeet, a woman, and a kid. Them that has objections can go to the devil."

So saying, he turned abruptly on his heel and returned to his friends. Jim whistled; but Alfred smiled softly, and began to recap the nipples of his

old-fashioned Colt's revolvers. Alfred was at that time the best shot with a six-shooter in the middle West.

Seeing this, Billy's frown relaxed into a grin.

"I'm thinkin' that them that *does* object probably *will* go to the devil," said he.

In half an hour the news was all over camp. When Michaïl Lafond heard of it, he left his dinner half eaten and went out to talk earnestly to a great variety of people.

III

THE MAN WHO STOOD "99"

THE three scouts would never have been able to explain satisfactorily their reasons for being so easily persuaded, or their obstinacy in adhering to the determination so suddenly made. Prue Welch would have thanked a divine providence for it. The doctor, her husband, took it as quite in the natural course of events.

He was a queer man, the doctor, a pathetic little figure in the world's progress—an outgrowth of it, in a certain way of thinking.

Born of good old New England stock, he spent his studious, hard-working boyhood on a farm. At sixteen he went to the high school, where he was adored by his teachers because he stood ninety-nine in algebra. Inconsequently, but inevitably, this rendered him shy in the presence of girls, and unwarrantably conscious of his hands and feet. So, when he went to college, he spent much time in the library, more in the laboratory, and none at all in the elemental little chaos of a world that can do so much for the wearers of queer clothes and queerer habits of thought. He graduated, a spectacled grind, bowed of shoulder, straight of hair, earnest of thought.

Much reading of abstract speculation had developed in him a reverence for the impractical that amounted almost to obsession. Given a bit of useless information and a chunk of solid wisdom, he would at once

bestow his preference on the former, provided, always, it were theoretical enough. He knew the dips of strata from their premonitary surface wiggles to their final plunges into unknown and heated depths. He could deliver to you a cross-section of your pasture lot, streaked like the wind-clouds of early winter; and he could explain it in the most technical language. Nothing rock-ribbed and ancient escaped him in his frequent walks. He saw everything—except, perchance, the beauty that clothes the rock-ribbed and ancient as a delicate aura, invisible to the eye of science—and he labelled what he saw, and ticketed it away in the pigeon-holes of his many-chambered mind, where he could put his finger on it at any given moment in the easiest fashion in the world.

It is very pleasant to know where the Paleozoic has faulted, and how; or why the stratifications of the ice age do not show glacial scorings in certain New England localities. To verify in regard to lamination green volumes of obese proportions, or to recognize the projection into the geological physical world of the thought of a master, this is fine, is noble; this makes to glow the kindly light in spectacled blue eyes.

Adoniram Welch left college with many honors. He returned to his little New England village, and for a space was looked upon as a local celebrity. This is a bad thing for most youths, but Adoniram it affected not at all. It availed only to draw upon him, in sweet contemplation, another pair of blue eyes, womanly, serious blue eyes, under a tangle of curly golden hair.

And so, although Prue Welch was a homely name, and Prue Winterborne a beautiful one, when Adoniram accepted the chair of geology offered him by his

alma mater, the owner of the blue eyes went with him, and the new professor's thick spectacles somehow glowed with a kindly warmth, which even fine specimens of the finest fossils had never been able to kindle. He settled down into a little white house, in a little blossomy " yard," under a very big, motherly elm, and gave his days to the earnest mental dissection of the cuticle of the globe. His wife attacked the problem of life on six hundred dollars a year.

Now, from this state of affairs sprang two results. The professor evolved a theory, and Mrs. Professor, although she did not in the least understand what it was all about, came to believe in it, to champion it, to consider it quite the most important affair of the age. The professor thought so, too; and so they were happy and united.

The theory was a tremendous affair, having to do with nothing less than the formation of our continent. It was revolutionary in the extreme, but shed such illumination in hitherto dark corners of this and allied subjects that its probability, *prima facie*, was practically assured. To Prue Welch it seemed to be quite so; but the inexorable eye of science discerned breaks in the chain of continuity, gaps in the procession of proofs, which, while not of vast importance in a specious argument designed to furnish with peptonized intellectual pabulum the more frivolous-minded layman, nevertheless sufficed to destroy utterly its worth as a serious hypothesis. These breaks, the professor explained, could never be filled except by actual field-work. The proper field, he assured her, was the country of the Black Hills of South Dakota, then as distant as the antipodes. He proved this scientifically. Prue

agreed, but did not understand. A number of years later she did understand, from hearing Billy Knapp joking with Alfred.

"These yar hills," said Billy, "was made last. The Lo'd had a little of everything left when he'd finished the rest, so he chucked it down on the prairie, an' called it the Black Hills."

However, the mere fact of her comprehension mattered not one iota. If Adoniram said a thing was so, to Prue its truth at once became age-old.

So it happened that the great theory hung fire wofully, and the country of their dreams came to lie beyond the frontier wilderness, whose tide was but just beginning to ebb back from the pine woods of Wisconsin and the oak openings of Illinois. This was finality. What lay beyond they did not trouble to inquire. The professor sighed the sigh of patient abnegation. The professor's wife believed, with beautiful trust, that a divine providence would provide, and that with the earth-wide fame that must accrue to the author of *New World Erosions* would come added opportunity for added reputation.

For a number of years the kind-hearted little professor looked steadfastly out of the window during examinations in geology, and turned a resolute deaf ear to the rustling of leaves as the despairing student manipulated a cleverly concealed volume. For a number of years he came home at four o'clock in the afternoon, and feverishly corrected blue books until six, in order to ransom from professional duties the whole of the precious evening. For a number of years he consulted authorities in German and other difficult languages, and waxed ever more enthusiastic over the

new theory of erosions. During the interim the baby learned to walk, and Prue's belief in its father strengthened, if such a thing were possible. In time the professor and his wife grew to be quite old. He looked every bit of his thirty, and she was an aged dowager of twenty-five. Little Miss Prue was just two and a half.

One day, early in the spring, the professor was called to the door of his class-room to receive a telegram. He read it quietly, then dismissed his class, and went home.

"Prue," said he to his wife, "my father has just died. I must go up there at once, for he was all I had left in the world, and it is not seemly that I should be from his side."

You can see from his manner of speech that the professor had by now read a great many bookish books.

"We will go together," replied Prue.

So they put away mortality in the old Puritan fashion, standing wistful, but tearless, hand in hand, on the hither side of grief; for though in perspective the figure of the old New Englander loomed with a certain gloomy and ascetic grandeur, in the daily contact he had always held himself sternly and straitly in fear of God. For him the twin lamps of Science and Love had burned but darkly.

Adoniram Welch found himself sole heir of a few thousands and the old home.

On the way back to the college town, they planned the Western trip. The professor was to resign his chair at once. He and Mrs. Prue and little Miss Prue would travel by rail to Kansas or Iowa, there to join one of the wagon-trains which now, in the height of

the first great gold excitement, continually braved savage warfare and brute thirst to gain the dark shadows of the hills.

During the next three weeks, Prue was a busy woman. The professor resigned, becoming thereby only "the doctor"; had an explanatory interview with the president of the college, and gave himself over to a series of delightful potterings. He pottered about among his belongings, and personally superintended just how everything was not stowed away. He pottered about among the faculty, to the members of which he talked mysteriously with ill-concealed exultation, for the theory was also a secret. He lovingly packed his books and papers and a small portion of his clothes, all of which Prue had to hunt out and repack. Altogether, he had a delightful, absent-minded time, seeing in the actual world no further than the end of his nose, but in the visionary world of his most technical hopes far beyond the farthest star.

But Prue had a New England village to answer; she had the family's belongings to take care of—no great task in itself; she had little Miss Prue to oversee. Grave men who were professors of astronomy, or Greek antiquities, or Hebrew, and who, therefore, knew all about it, told her, in language of whose correctness Addison would have been proud, that the aborigines of the American plains were bloodthirsty in the extreme. Fluttering women detailed anecdotes of sudden death at the hands of Indians. One and all bade her good-by with the firm conviction, openly expressed, that she would never return; upon which all whom weeping became wept, while others displayed their best handkerchiefs as a sort of defiant substitute

for more open emotion. Prue saw the little town fade into distance with mingled feelings, of which terror was the predominant, until her husband explained to her, by the aid of an airy little octavo which he had stuffed into an inadequate bag, that Professor Nincomb's theory of glacial action was not only false, but would be conclusively proved to be so by the new theory of erosion. At this she brightened. Prue owned to a vague impression that glacial action had something to do with the North Pole, so the argument *per se* had little weight with her. But Prue was a New Englander, and devout in the New England fashion, and she settled back on Divine Providence with great thankfulness. She argued that no scheme of things could dispense ruthlessly with so wonderful an affair as the theory of erosions. Therefore the scheme of things would take care of the only possessor of the theory. Indians lost their terrors, she and little Miss Prue fell asleep together, leaving the doctor still poring excitedly over the octavo of Professor Nincomb.

Their first serious difficulties were encountered at Three Rivers. Of course, in the circumstances, the mild little doctor quite failed in his attempts to secure transportation. How should he, a scientist, know or care anything about gold excitements? The hustle confused him, the crowd stunned him, the fierce self-reliance and lack of consideration of these rough men alarmed him.

He came back to the board hotel very much discouraged. "There is not a conveyance of any sort to be found," he informed Mrs. Prue, "and there is great difficulty in estimating the precise duration of the present state of affairs. It may continue into next sum-

mer; or so, at least, I was informed by a very estimable person."

That was unbearable. Think of little Miss Prue being required, in the third year of her diminutive life, to face the heat of the plains in midsummer! Think of the cost of living a twelvemonth in such a place as Three Rivers! Prue put on her hat and went out into the turbulent camp. Until that moment she had deemed it wisest to remain in her room.

She was greeted only with respect. Men paused and looked after her. You see, Prue had such grave, calm eyes, that looked straight at you with so much confidence; and such a sensitive, serious mouth, that argued such a capacity for making up quiet opinions of people—and acting on them—that you were always very much inclined to take off your hat, even if you were Tony Quinn and middling drunk. It was not ten minutes before she had corroborated the doctor's bad news; but she had also heard incidentally of Billy Knapp, Alfred, and Buckley. The hotel-keeper pointed out the latter—that quiet man with the brown beard. Prue went straight to him and stated her case.

In the statement she laid great stress on the importance of the dip of strata. If the doctor did not get to work before long, he would be unable to finish his explorations before his means had become exhausted. Prue waxed quite technical. She used a number of long words and a few long phrases, hoping thus to awe the calm and contemplative individual in front of her.

Buckley did not comprehend the reasons. He did comprehend the unutterable eloquence of the eyes, for though her logic went for naught with the scout, it

succeeded nevertheless in impressing Prue herself, in bringing more vividly before her the importance of it all. She clasped her hands, and tears choked her. When she had finished, Jim said gravely that she should go.

IV

ALFRED USES HIS SIX-SHOOTER

MICHAIL LAFOND merely spread the news, and made it a subject of discussion. In his statements he said nothing of his own grievance, nor did he suggest a plan. He knew that this was not a case for violence, nor did he care that it should become such. His actions always depended very much on how an impulse hit his queerly constructed nature. In the present instance he might either resolve to get even with Billy Knapp by means of personal vengeance, or his anger might take the direction of a cold, set determination to get through the plains journey in spite of the scout's prohibition. That the latter, rather than the former course happened to appeal to him, was purely a matter of chance. So, though he said little to the direct point, the plan finally adopted in secret by a choice few had a good deal of his desire mingled in its substance.

The quiescence of the camp astonished and puzzled the three scouts. They had expected an outbreak, and were prepared for it. It did not come.

The three days slipped by; everything was packed; and early in the morning, before the dawn's freshness had left the air, the little band defiled across the prairie. A curious crowd gathered sleepily to watch it go, but there was no demonstration. Billy openly congratulated himself. Alfred looked to see that his revolvers were still capped.

The party comprised an even dozen "schooners," each drawn by four tough ponies. Besides these, a dozen men rode on horseback. On occasion, their mounts could be pressed into draft service. The men themselves were a representative lot; tall, bronzed, silent. They had taken part in the fierce Indian wars, then just beginning to lull; they had ridden pony-express with Wild Bill; they had stalked revenue officers in the mountains of Tennessee. As they strode with free grace beside their teams, or sat, with loose-swaying shoulders, their wiry little broncos, they drew to themselves in the early light the impressiveness of an age—the age of pioneers.

At their head rode Billy Knapp. At their rear rode Jim Buckley. Alfred was a little of everywhere at once. As a matter of habit, these three carried their rifles cross-fashion in front of them, but the new Winchesters and the old long-barrelled pieces of the other score of men were still slung inside the canvas covers, for the Indian country was yet to see. Beneath the axles hung pails. The wagons contained much food, a good supply of ammunition, and a scanty equipment of the comforts of life. In one of them were three wooden boxes, two trunks, the doctor, Mrs. Prue, and little Miss Prue herself, laughingly proud at being allowed to dangle along the dew-wet grass the heavy coil of a black snake whip.

The men shouted suddenly, the horses leaned to their collars, the wagons creaked, and the swaying procession began to loom huge and ghost-like in the mist that steamed golden-white from the surface of the prairie.

Then, from the haze of the town, six more wagons

silently detached themselves, and followed in the wake of the first.

This second caravan differed from the other in that it deployed no outriders, and from the close-drawn canvas of its wagons came, once in a while, the sharp cry of a child, followed immediately by the comforting of a woman. The men drove from the seats, and across the lap of each was a weapon.

About five miles out, the first caravan halted until the second drew nearer. Billy Knapp cantered back to it. One of the men in the foremost wagon thereupon clamped the brake and jumped to the ground, where he stood, leaning on the muzzle of his big mountaineer's rifle, chewing a nonchalant plug.

"What's this?" demanded Billy, reining in his horse.

The man shifted his quid.

"Nawthin'," he drawled, "'xcept that this yare outfit's a-goin' too."

Billy's eyes snapped.

"We settled all thet afore," said he, with outward calm.

"This yare outfit's a-goin' too," reiterated the man.

"The hell it is!" cried the scout angrily. "We all said no women and no poor hosses, and that goes. Yore hosses are a lot of crowbait, and——"

"The women is women as *is* women," cried another voice, "and not yore leetle white-faced, yaller-haired sort that'd keel over if yo' said boo to her!"

During the laconic dialogue, the schooners had gradually drawn nearer, until now they were grouped in a rough crescent around the two men. Billy looked

up to see a tall woman in blue gingham haranguing him from behind one of the seats.

"I reckon if she can go, we can; and you jest chalk that down, Mr. Speckleface!" she went on. Billy was slightly pockmarked.

Other canvas flaps opened, and the audience was increased by half.

"We're goin'," went on the woman, "whether you want us to or not; an' what's more, you got t' take care of us in the Injun country, an' if you don't I'll curse you from the grave, you white-livered, no 'count cradle robber, you! Folks has some rights on the plains, an' you know it jest's well as I do, an' if you think you can shake yore ole pals for a lot of no 'count tenderfeet, an' not find trouble, you jest fools yoreself up a lot, let me tell you that. If Dave yere had th' sperrit of a coyote, he'd fix you, Mr. Scout!" with vast contempt.

"You men are all alike! A pretty face——" began the virago again, but Billy had fled at speed.

The man, who had been chuckling silently, spat and threw the rifle into the hollow of his arm.

"Good for you, Susie," he remarked.

"You shut up!" replied Susie with acerbity, and retired within. The man had yet to learn that one should never voluntarily step within the notice of an angry woman.

The two wagon-trains proceeded as before—one behind the other by about half a mile.

At intervals Billy or Jim went back to expostulate. They might be able to undertake the responsibility of one woman, hardly of nine! But they never got a hearing, as all the conversation was vituperative and one-sided.

Alfred led the party to a deep, swift crossing of the Platte. By the aid of the extra ponies the ford was made without loss. The second party had a hard struggle, but emerged dripping and triumphant.

Billy and Jim were again put to rout in an attempt at mere verbal dissuasion.

Alfred took them roundabout through a piece of country, cut and gullied by rains. Some hills they climbed by the help of long ropes. The second party dragged their wagons up singly, using all their animals to each wagon. They lost some time, but the evening of the day following they strung out in the rear as imperturbably as ever. Alfred ordered all the riders into the wagons, and, by alternating the ponies, made forced marches, hoping thus to shake the others off. The others, however, discovering that Alfred's party had been doubling and twisting through the worst country, detached a single rider, whose business it was to search out the directest and easiest route. Thus they caught up. Alfred discovered it too late, for they were now on the borders of the Indian country.

Here a serious problem presented itself. The second party had, up to now, made no attempt to close in and join forces. On entering the Indian country, they would certainly do so. The question was, whether they should be resisted or received.

If they were not repulsed, could they be brought through successfully? If they were resisted, would the resistance be effective? One thing or the other must be decided immediately, for, whatever the policy adopted, it must be a settled policy before entering hostile ground.

In the contest of endurance, the score of men com-

prising the main party had taken part amusedly. They were under the command of the scouts. When the scouts ordered speed, speed was made. When they said to climb hills, hills were climbed. When they advised difficult fords, the difficulties of crossing were overcome. If the other train had trouble keeping up with the procession, why, that was good enough fun. But actual resistance was a different matter. After all, according to their lights, these other men were entirely in the right. They had been excluded from the expedition, on the basis of a rule which had been agreed to after some grumbling; and now that the rule had been broken by the very framers of it, there seemed to be no longer fair grounds of exclusion; and therefore a certain rough sense of justice inclined them to take sides with the bearers of the pea rifles in the rear. At the same time, they felt the truth of Billy's statement, that it would be impossible to get so unwieldy a caravan over the rough country and through the dangers to come. So, seeing reason on both sides, they maintained a guarded neutrality.

Resistance being out of the question, the three next considered the other horn of the dilemma. Alfred rode over to examine the prospective addition to the party. He found the animals in poor condition, partly because of the forced marches he had himself imposed. In his opinion they would not last out the journey, and he so reported, to the great consternation of the other two.

While they lamented, Prue came up and heard a part. She demanded the whole, and they told her frankly. The heroine of romance, realizing herself the cause of the trouble, would have offered to return with the other women, and so the whole question would

have been resolved; but Prue was only a very nice little woman, in love with her husband. Her chief concern was not the triumph of eternal justice, but whether the whole expedition would come to nothing. She pondered.

"If you can't keep them from going with us, and if you can't get through if they *do* go with us," she said finally, "it seems to me that the only way to fix it would be to do something so they couldn't go"—with which vague hint this Puritan looked wickedly at them all, and went away, clinching her small hands with anger. From the hint, they made a plan to which all three agreed.

Next morning Jim roused the camp an hour earlier than usual, and insisted on an immediate departure. The horses were hitched, and the breakfast things put away. Then Alfred rode over to the other camp, with Jim and Billy following at a little distance.

People start a camp on the plains, in a safe country, by arranging the wagons in a rough semicircle. Behind this semicircle the horses are hobbled, and left to graze. In front of it the cooking-fire is built. During the night, besides the regular sentinels, one man is assigned to ride herd, but this is unnecessary in full daylight; so at breakfast the horses are left to graze quite unprotected. In a hostile country, picket ropes and more care are needed. This party had so hobbled twenty-four animals—four for each wagon, which is a scant supply.

Alfred cantered rapidly up to the herd from the east. He had made a long détour, so as to approach in the eye of the sun. With the twelve chambers of his revolvers he killed eleven horses. As I have said, Alfred

was one of the best pistol shots in the middle West. After this, he put spurs to his mount, and shot away like an arrow in the direction of his own camp.

The unsuspicious mountaineers, at breakfast, did not gather their wits until too late. Then eight of them leaped fiercely upon some of the remaining animals, and pursued the wagon-train, which, under the frantic urging of Billy and Jim, was already under way in close order. A few of their bullets spattered against the wagon-bodies, and they wounded a horse.

This roused the other men. Neutrality was all right enough, but they could not afford to lose horses, so they made such a brave show of rifle muzzles that the eight fell back. Three to one was too big odds; but their rage was great.

Then Jim took his life in his hands, and rode a little way out on the prairie toward them, waving a white handkerchief. Somebody shot at him, and bored a hole through the looseness of his flannel shirt, whereupon he dismounted and dropped two horses with his new-model Winchester. His own horse was killed in the exchange, but Jim could take care of himself in frontier fashion.

Before the men could reload or move, Jim, imperturbably, arose from behind his dead mount, and waved his white handkerchief again. There was a moment's hesitation, then someone returned the signal. Jim promptly advanced. His remarks were brief and businesslike, and were received in sullen silence.

"You fellows have got to go back," said he. "You have hosses enough left to get your women back with, by goin' slow. If you try to shoot us up any, we'll kill every hoof you have. So don't come any funny business."

He turned squarely on his heel, and walked away rapidly. He wanted to get his distance before the reaction came. Michaïl Lafond, no longer impassive, shook his rifle after him.

"You damn skunk!" he shouted, hoarse with anger. "Tell your damn woman I'll pull every hair from her head!"

Jim did not turn his head, but ducked into the long grass, where he wriggled along Indian fashion. Lafond, who had thrown his rifle into position for a shot, started forward in pursuit, his face twisted with passion, but he was dragged back by main strength. Two of the horses bore double, and the little group turned sullenly toward the east.

The mood of the original party, after this incident, was grim. The bonds of plains brotherhood had been lightly broken.

Alfred had resorted to such desperate measures in making the best of undesirable conditions brought to pass by someone else.

Billy Knapp had done so because he had entered into a game, and declined to be beaten by anyone.

Jim alone was happy. He had done it solely and simply for a woman; and the woman had seen him fight for her.

V

LAFOND DESERTS

THE eight men of the attacking party returned slowly to the little dip of land which held the temporary camp. They were defeated, baffled, and angry. If a stranger had accosted them at that moment, he would probably have been gruffly answered one minute and assaulted the next. But for the present they were silent. They were Anglo-Saxons and Tennessee mountaineers for the most part; hence they were also adaptable, and attuned to the fatalism that comes from much contemplating of cloud-capped peaks and wind-swept pines.

Not so with Michaïl Lafond, who alternately raved and wept, frantically brandishing his rifle. An impassive mountaineer sat behind him, holding him to the party. If not thus restrained, he would, in the heat of anger, have attacked the whole train single-handed, for he was brave enough in his way. The sober second-thought of the Indian in him might perhaps have caused him to pause on the brink of the charge and sink into the long grasses to await the chance of a more silent blow; but the impulse up to that point would have been real and whole-souled. So it was now. The man raved as a maniac might. He called down the curses of heaven on his companions for cowards.

And in this, when he reached camp, he was ably seconded by the women. They surrounded him in a voluble and indignant group, and listened to him with

sympathy, casting glances of scorn toward their passive lords and masters in the background. In their way they became as excited as Lafond. One or two wept. Most employed the variety of their vocabularies in giving the world what is known as a " piece of their minds."

In the still air of a prairie morning their hysterical cackle rose like the crying of an indignant band of brant. Lafond told, dramatically, what should have been done. The women, in turn, told how effectively they would have done it. The men were taking stock of the situation.

The mountaineers wasted little discussion on what might have been done. The question before them was that of the most practical method of returning over the long miles of prairie they had traversed in their pursuit of Alfred and his outfit. They entertained not a moment's doubt as to the necessity of the return. Their equipment consisted now of ten horses and six wagons. By humoring the animals they might be able to get through with a pair to each schooner. This meant the abandonment of one of the wagons, and the lightening of the others. It was decided. One of the men strode to the group of women.

Lafond was in the midst of a tirade, but when he saw the mountaineer approach, he prepared to pay eager attention to the plan of action.

" H'yar," announced the latter, with a little the heavier shading on his accustomed drawl, " that's enough of this h'yar jaw, I reckon. You-all come along and pack up."

" And when is it that we do pursue them? " asked Lafond eagerly.

"Pursue nothin'," replied the man. "We're goin' back."

There was a moment's silence.

"And you intend not to get that revenge?" the half-breed inquired.

"Revenge!" snorted the man. "You damn fool—with *that* outfit?" He swept a descriptive gesture toward the women. "Besides, what's the good now?" Lafond fell silent, and withdrew from the group.

The man of mixed blood is not like other men, and cannot be judged by the standards of either race. From his ancestors he takes qualities haphazard, without balance or proportion, so that the defects of virtues may often occur without the assistance of the virtues themselves. And, besides, he develops traits native to neither of the parent races, traits which perhaps can never be comprehended by us who call ourselves the saner people. He is superstitious, given to strange impulses, which may unexpectedly, and without reason, harden into convictions; obscure in his ends; unscrupulous in his means. No man lives who can predict what may or may not suffice to set into motion the machinery of his passions. A triviality is enough to-day. To-morrow the stroke of a sledge may not even jar the cogs. But, once started, the results may be tremendous, and quite out of proportion to the first careless touch on the lever. Such passions are dangerous, both to their possessor and to those who stand in their way.

Now, from the gainsaying of his lesser revenge—the proving to Billy Knapp the futility of his objections—Lafond conceived the desire for a greater. There entered into his life one of those absorbing pas-

sions which are to be encountered in all their intensity only in such men as he—passions which come to be ruling motives in the lives of those who harbor them; gathering to themselves all lesser forces which are spread more evenly over saner existences; losing their first burning intensity, perhaps, but becoming thereby only the more sustained, cool, and deadly; so that at the last they lie unnoticed in the background of the man's ordinary life, coloring, influencing every act—a religion to which, without anger, but without relenting, he bends every long-planned effort of even his trivial and daily deeds. You may not understand this, unless you have known a half-breed; but it is true.

Interrupted in the midst of his flow of anger, and deprived of the immediate solace of shooting things at his enemies, Lafond fell into a sulking fit. During the rest of the day he brooded. After dark that night he wound his way silently through the grasses, crept up behind the solitary sentinel considered necessary in this peaceful country, stabbed the man in the back, and returned to camp. Thus his way was clear. Then he took from the wagons three slabs of bacon, a small sack of coffee, a large supply of powder, lead, and caps, a blanket, and a frying-pan and cup. With these he mounted the hill, past the dead sentinel, to the ponies. Two of the latter he drew apart from the herd. One of them he saddled; the other he packed with his supplies. Then the half-breed led them silently westward for a good half-mile. Then he mounted and rode away.

VI

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN

THE wagon-train under the command of Billy Knapp, and Alfred, and Jim Buckley had a very hard trip before they were done with it. The only difficulty they did not encounter was lack of water. There was too much of that. Several times the party had to camp in one spot for days while the wagons were laboriously warped across rivers of mud and quicksand, with steep, slippery clay banks. How little Prue stood the journey so well, neither her father, her mother, nor the men of the party were able to divine; but she did, and, what is more, she seemed to think it great fun. So cheerful was she, and so sunny, that the men came to grudge each other her company. And as for Mrs. Prue and the doctor, who could help loving the patient sweetness of the one, or the pathetic, gentle, impracticable kindness of the other?

Yes, it was a hard journey; but somehow the feeling was not entirely of joy and relief when the stockade of Frenchman's Creek shimmered across the broad, flat foot-hills. There they separated. The dangers were over.

Then, to the surprise of everyone, the doctor waked up and knew just where he wanted to go. He displayed an unexpected familiarity with the general topography of the hills. It puzzled Billy. And, to the vaster astonishment of both his *confrères*, Jim sud-

denly announced, with quite unwonted volubility, that he had been intending all along to start in prospecting at the end of this trip, and that here he meant to quit scouting and leave the society of his brothers in arms —unless, of course, he added, as a doubtful afterthought, they wanted to join him. They profanely replied that they did not.

Most of the men pushed on immediately to Rockerville, whither a majority of the former inhabitants of Frenchman's Creek had already emigrated. Alfred and Billy decided to get over in the Limestone for a "big hunt" before returning East. Prue said good-by to them with real feeling, and most of them threw out their chests and were very gruff and rude because they were sorry to leave. Prue understood. They were kind-hearted men, after all, these rough pioneers. Billy remembered for almost two years how she looked when she said that, which was extraordinary for Billy. He had led so varied a life as pony-express rider, stage-driver, scout, Indian, bronco-buster, hunter, and trapper, that he had little room in his memory for anything short of bloodshed or a triumph for himself.

Finally, after all the rest had gone, Jim and the doctor made the mutually delightful discovery that they had selected the same locality, the one for his prospecting, the other for his scientific investigations. So the doctor simply left his outfit in Jim's wagon, and they all went up together.

The little scientist was as excited as a child. To him the country was as a document—a document which he had studied thoroughly in the pocket editions. He now had it before him in the original manuscript, open and unabridged.

And indeed, even to an ordinary observer, the Black Hills are a strange series of formations.

They run north and south at the westernmost edge of the northern prairie, and are, altogether, about as large as the State of Vermont. Unlike other ranges, they possess no one ridge that serves as a backbone to the system. The separate peaks rise tumultuously, like the rip of seas in a tideway, without connection, solitary, sombre. Between them lie deep gorges, or broad stretches of grass-park, which dip away and away, until one catches the breath at the grand free sweep of them. Huge castellated dikes crop up from the ridge-tops like ramparts. Others rise parallel in the softest verdure, guarding between their perpendicular sides streets as narrow and clean-cut as the alleys of a city of skyscrapers.

Through it all, back and forth, like the walls of a labyrinth, run the broken, twisted, faintly defined geological systems, which cross each other so frequently and so vigorously that all semblance of order is lost in the tumultuous upheaval. Here are strata deposited by the miocene tertiary; here are breakings forth of metamorphic rocks of many periods; here are the complex results of diverse influences and forces. Down in the south is a great cavern—of which ninety-seven miles and twenty-five hundred rooms have, at this writing, been explored—which was once the interior of a geyser. For ages it spouted; for ages more its fluids crystallized and petrified into varied and beautiful forms; and then, finally, many layers of stratified rock were slowly overlaid to seal forever this dried-out, beautiful, lifeless mummy of a cave. It lies there now, as it has lain through the centuries, with a

single, tiny opening by which it can be entered—a palace of vast re-echoing halls, hung with jewels, a horror-haunted honeycomb of unsounded depths, a solemn abode wherein not the faintest drip of water, not the gentlest sigh of air through the corridors, breaks the eternal silence. Only its mouth roars continually as the winds rush in or out. The Indians assign to it the spirits of their dead warriors, and cannot be induced to approach it. Geologists rave over it, and cannot be persuaded to come away.

But this is in the latter day of railroads and tenderfeet. At the time of which this story treats, little was known of the country. It was simply a great second-hand shop, of a little of everything in the geological line.

When the party arrived at Spanish Gulch, the doctor was so eager to get into the wonderful hills that only with the greatest difficulty did he constrain himself to help Jim erect a log cabin for the accommodation of his family. Even then he was not of much use, although he could at least help to lift timbers. Jim practically did it alone, and it took him almost a month; but when it was done, it was very nice. The doctor accepted the free gift of the scout's labor and skill quite as a matter of course, just as he had taken the free gift of an ordinarily expensive pilotage across the plains; but the woman appreciated, and perhaps she understood, for she suddenly became very shy in Jim's presence. And then, sometimes, she would gaze at him, when he was not looking, with an adoration of gratitude filling her eyes.

After the doctor's home was finished, Jim betook himself into another gulch, where he constructed a

less elaborate shelter for his own occupation. Thenceforward he spent much of his time in mysterious prospecting operations; but two or three times a week he liked to sit perfectly silent under the tree which overshadowed the doctor's cabin, watching Prue, if she happened to be near, playing with Miss Prue, or trying to talk with the doctor. He never went inside the house, even in the winter; and he never seemed to try to know Prue any more intimately. It would have been difficult for him to say just what pleasure he discovered in these visits.

After a little, the routine of life became fixed. The doctor took up his work systematically. Each morning he plunged into the hills. His little bent form moved from ridge to ridge, following his own especial leads as earnestly as the most eager gold prospector of them all. Sometimes he got lost, but generally he managed to reach home at sunset. He was entirely preoccupied. He ate his meals as they were set before him without question, he pulled on his well-mended clothes without noticing the new patches, he warmed himself before his fire without a thought of whence came the wood, blazing up the mud-chimney.

Prue at first wondered a little at this, for even in his intensest absorption the doctor's home-life had been much to him; but in time she came to appreciate his mood, and to rely on herself even more than usual. She had such an exalted opinion of his work that she easily fell into the habit of sacrificing herself to it. She watched for the things that pleased him, or, rather, did not bother him, for his pleasures were negative; she carefully excluded all disturbing influences, and came to look on this lonely time as only a probation, sooner

or later to be over, after which, in the fulness of his success, he would turn to her with his old love. To hasten this she would have cut off her right hand.

So, much to the disgust of Jim Buckley, the brave little woman took the management of things upon herself. During the long days, while the doctor was away, she schemed to make both ends meet. She raised a few vegetables in a plot of open ground on the sunny side of the creek, working in it daily with an old spade. Her face was hidden in the depths of a sunbonnet, and her hands were covered with a pair of deerskin gauntlets, for she could not forget, poor woman! that she was gently bred, and she hated to see her skin reddening in the dry air of the hills.

Items of necessity she bought scantily, sparingly, of travelling pedlars, for prices were high. Candles for the winter, corn-meal, occasionally flour, coffee, sugar —all these counted. Things cost so much more here than she had anticipated. Prue saw the end coming, distant though it might be. She sometimes did little bits of mending for passing miners, and was paid for it. Oftener she skimped on the daily meals, pretending that she was tired and did not care to eat. The doctor never noticed, nor did she mean that he should.

In the presence of his work, he could think of nothing else. Once, when they ran out of wood, she told him of it. It worried him for a week. Material necessities drew his mind away from the attitude of calm scientific investigation. The pile of fuel that goes with every new shack lasted the first winter through. After that was gone, Prue used the chips made when the house was built, as long as they held out. Then she tried to chop down a tree herself. Jim Buckley found

her sitting on a stone, the axe between her knees, her face buried in her hands. Beside her was a pine scarred at random with weak, ill-directed blows. He made a few profane remarks into his thick beard concerning the doctor, then took the axe from her, and started to work. In a week enough firewood was piled over against the house to last the winter. During that week he ate his noon meals in the little cabin. The woman did her best, and used up a fortnight's provisions in the attempt to make a respectable showing before the hungry man. But in spite of that he saw through her pitiful efforts, and offered to let her have money. She drew herself up and showed him the door. When he had gone, bewildered, she went out and looked at the white shining wood-pile and wept bitterly.

But in spite of economy the closest, and the sacrifice of absolutely every non-essential, the time came when the last cent had gone. The woman stood face to face with want. And, as ill-luck would have it, at this period the doctor was especially brimming with enthusiasm, for he had almost achieved the one result he needed to fill out his scheme. He worked feverishly to forestall the snow. He was full of his system, alternating between glowing enthusiasm and a haunting fear that the winter would set in too early. He must have uninterrupted time for work until then, he said. On this depended his professional reputation, their fortune.

She set her lips firmly and looked about her. The flour and meal were gone; there were no candles, and without candles how could the doctor put the last touches to his book when winter fell? Little light filtered through the oiled paper of the windows. She

sold her ring to some passing gamblers. The money soon slipped away. For a few days she fought hard with her pride. Then she put on her sunbonnet, and, kissing the child tenderly, went, with heightened color, down the gulch to Jim Buckley's.

She found him sitting on a stump in front of his dirt-roofed shack, pounding into sand some quartz in an iron mortar. He did not hear her until she stood beside him. Then he arose, drawing his gaunt form up quickly, taking off his broad hat, and wiping his grimy hands on his jeans.

"Mr. Buckley," she said hurriedly, before he could speak, "I have come to tell you how sorry I am that I was so rude to you. You have been very kind to me, and I had no right to speak to you as I did. No, no!" she implored, as Jim opened his mouth to expostulate. "I must tell you that, and *please* don't interrupt me.

"My husband is doing some very valuable work," Prue continued, "very valuable, and when he gets it done he will be very famous and very rich. But just now it takes all his time and attention, so that he doesn't realize—how—poor—we—are." The little woman's cheeks burned, and she lowered her head until the sunbonnet hid her face. "Of course, if I should tell him," she went on proudly, "he would attend to it at once. But I mustn't do that. He needs *such* a little time to finish his work, and I mustn't—must I?" And she suddenly looked up into Jim's honest eyes with an imploring gesture.

Jim was standing, his broad hat against his knee, looking at her fixedly. No doubt he was thinking how, when he had first seen her, her cheeks were as full and ripe as the apples of his old home in New England;

and was wondering if the dip of strata were worth this. Seeing that he intended no reply, she looked down again and went on.

"I came here to see you about that. Once, Mr. Buckley, you offered to lend me some money, and I —I—am afraid I was very rude. And now—oh, dear!" And suddenly the poor little figure in faded and patched calico sank to the ground, and began to sob as if her heart would break.

Jim was distressed. He started forward, hesitated, looked up at the sky and down the gulch. Then he threw down his hat and darted into the cabin, returning in a moment with a buckskin bag, which he tossed impulsively into her lap.

"There, there!" he said distractedly. "Why didn't you say so before? Stop! *Please* stop! Oh, the——"

She looked up suddenly with a blinding smile.

"Now, don't say anything naughty!" she cried airily through her tears. She laughed queerly at Jim's open mouth and astonished eyes. He could not grasp the meaning of her change of mood. Before he could recover, she was on her feet, a roguish vision of blushing cheeks and dancing eyes. She shook the buckskin bag in his face.

"Aren't you afraid you'll never be paid, sir?" she demanded; then, with a quick sob, "I think you are the kindest man in all the world!" The next instant the alders closed about her fluttering figure on the trail. For a week after, her cheeks burned, and she was afraid to look out of the cabin lest Jim should be coming up the path.

As the winter wore away, however, she began to see the bottom of the little buckskin bag. The doctor was

as absorbed as ever. She could not bring her pride to the point of asking Buckley for another loan, and so again the terror of poverty seized upon her. Her eyes looked harassed and worn, and her mouth had queer little lines in the corners. She would stand watching the flames in the chimney for hours, and then would turn suddenly, hungrily, and snatch up the little girl, devouring her with kisses. Sometimes she would wrinkle her brow, peeping into the doctor's manuscripts, trying to make out how near the end he was, but she always laid them down with a puzzled sigh. She did not eat enough, and she grew thin. She tried expedients of which she had read. For instance, one day she went down into the creek bottom and cut some willows. She peeled the bark from them, and from the inside rind she collected a quantity of fine white dust, with which she made a pasty kind of dough. The biscuits were tough and of a queer flavor. Even the doctor, after tasting one of them, looked up in surprise.

"What do you call this, my dear?" he inquired.

She clapped her hands gayly, and laughed with a catch in her voice.

"Oh, a queer Indian dish I've learned, that's all. You never *do* pay any attention to what you eat, so I thought I'd make you for once."

"Oh," said the doctor, smiling faintly.

The willow flour appeared no more.

So the long winter drew to its close, and still the brave little woman set her face resolutely forward, striving to help the doctor with his life-work as only a woman can. She could see no way out. The case was hopeless, and often she shed impotent tears over her inability. He worked so hard, and she did so little!

And then the spring brought with it the solution.

VII

THE REINS OF POWER

FOR two weeks after, Michaïl Lafond, cut loose from the crippled wagon-train returning to Three Rivers, travelled westward by the sun, sleeping under the stars, living on bacon, coffee, and an occasional bit of small game, drinking muddy water from buffalo wallows which providential rains had filled. At the end of that time he was raided by the Sioux. When they approached him, he led forward his two ponies, placed his rifle on the ground in front of their noses, unslung his powder-horn and laid it beside the weapon, and stepped back, throwing his arms wide apart. The Indians rode forward silently, a strange, naked band, whose fancy ran to chrome yellow, and took possession of Lafond and his equipment.

The half-breed became a squaw man, and lived with these Indians for some time. At first he was given drudgery to do. He did it, but kept his eyes open, and learned the language. After a little his chance came.

The band captured a wagon-train, and massacred its men and women. It found itself in possession of fifty or sixty horses, half a score of wagons, some provisions, and a goodly quantity of blankets, axes, utensils, and the rude necessities of life on the frontier. An Indian cannot possess too many ponies, he is always ready to eat, and blankets come handy in winter; but he has absolutely no use for the rest of the plunder.

So he usually puts a torch to the lot, and has a bonfire by way of celebration.

On this occasion, Michaïl Lafond succeeded in getting Lone Wolf to postpone the bonfire, to lend him twenty ponies, and to detail to his service half as many squaws. The feat in itself was a mark of genius, as anyone who knows the Indian character will admit, and cost Michaïl many of his newly learned words, put together with all of his native eloquence.

The twenty ponies, driven by the ten squaws, drew the schooners and their contents to the Bad Lands, where Michaïl concealed them in a precipitous gully of the deeply eroded sort so common in that strange, rainless district. Then he returned fifteen of the ponies to Lone Wolf. Lone Wolf's band took up quarters within striking distance of the *cached* schooners.

All this was done by Michaïl Lafond, and when it was completed he drew a long breath. He felt that the foundations of his influence were laid. It was no light thing thus to have drawn self-willed savages from their accustomed ways of life. He had done it only by vague promises of great benefits to accrue in the immediate future, said benefits to be "big medicine" in the extreme. Lone Wolf had pondered much; had seen an opportune shooting star; had consented.

A month later, a half-breed returned alone across the plains from the hill country. At Pierre he announced open trail. He had himself come through without the least trouble, he claimed, although he had seen many Indians. This was strictly true. He went on to say that he would sell his outfit cheap, as he was anxious to go on east. The gold prospects were good. He had a partner squatting on several claims, to whom

he would return the following year. He hinted mysteriously of capital to be invested and exhibited a small nugget of placer gold. Most of this was untrue, and the nugget he had found, not in the placer beds, but in a small pasteboard box in one of the schooners.

The outfit brought three hundred and fifty dollars, for the half-breed sold cheap. With this money and the horses he departed the day following.

Michaïl was now richer by three hundred and fifty dollars and five horses than he had been before his capture by the Indians. Were it not for two considerations, he might have decamped with the proceeds. Conscience was not one of them. In the first place, his Caucasian instincts taught him to look ahead to larger things. In the second place, his Indian blood would not let him lose sight of certain bits of savagery he had in contemplation. So, instead of decamping, he purchased with the money, in a town where he was unknown, five of the new breech-loading rifles and nearly five thousand rounds of ammunition. His tale here was simple. The trail was *not* open, and a wagon-train was soon to attempt the task of opening it. He loaded the munitions on his five broncos, and joined Lone Wolf, who was outlying near at hand.

In the course of the next six months a certain half-breed, with various stores and outfits, was observed in several small towns on the border of the frontier. In half of them he was headed east and sold his outfit; in the other half he was headed west and bought rifles. At the end of the year there remained no more schooners in the *cache* of the Bad Lands, but Lone Wolf's band was the best armed in all the West. Michaïl Lafond had let slip the chance of embezzling

some thousands of dollars, but he had gained what was much more valuable to him—power over an efficient band of fighting men, and the implicit confidence of a tribe of Sioux Indians. He was respected and feared. His unseen influence was felt throughout the whole plains country.

Lafond was too shrewd either to repeat his venture or to become identified with the tribe. His influence, as has been said, was unseen and unsuspected. Lone Wolf's band was successful from the Indian standpoint, pernicious from the white man's. That was all that appeared on the outside. Lafond himself became a savage. He slept out with little cover, and often rode with none at all. He ate dog and rattlesnake, when dog and rattlesnake happened to be on the bill of fare. He carried a knife deep in the recess of a long, loose buckskin sheath; and from the ridge of his tepee hung five clotted horrors, torn from the heads of the victims of his personal prowess. The number of these might easily have been augmented, but Michaïl struck seldom in his own person. When he did, not one of the victims escaped, for no man must have seen Michaïl, the savage. Michaïl, the civilized, would need a clear field before him when once again he appeared in the towns.

The life was fascinating to such as he. He loved it, but he did not forget his purposes. When at last he had gathered firmly the reins of his power, he shook them, and the twin steeds of Murder and Rapine swept destroyingly through the land.

For the present there was peace on the plains. Wagon-trains came across the Pierre trail, or further down along South Fork. Custer explored. White men settled in the Black Hills, in spite of the treaty.

The Indians hunted buffalo, and their wives made robes, and cut tepee poles from the valley of Iron Creek.

But in spite of all the seeming tranquillity, the seeds of discord had been sown broadcast, and Lafond, with his devilish cleverness of insight, could see that the struggle was not long to wait. Both sides felt aggrieved, and both sides had more than a show of reason for feeling so. Perhaps, in the long run, this was an inevitable result of the advance of civilization; but it is a little unfortunate that the provisional races must be set aside so summarily. That fact serves occasionally to cast a doubt in reflective minds on the ultimate benefit of the civilization.

We who look upon our tamed country, or those plainsmen who have perforce to struggle in the thick of the avenging troubles which follow injustice as surely as symptoms follow the disease, may not be able to see the Indian's side of the question. We, the peaceful citizens, enjoy the security of policed cities and fenced prairies; and we are convinced that it is worth the price. They, the pioneers, fight, and are maimed; they lose their worldly possessions, and their heart-strings are twanged to the tuning of grief; and so they become partisans, to whom the old scriptural saying that " he who is not for me is against me " comes home with a sternness brewed of tears.

But to those others who looked on from the height, to the men who sat safe, but moved the pawns on the board—to them there was a real justice, and they infringed it; a real duty, and they failed it. They held the whip hand and spared not the lash, and it shall be visited unto them.

Nearly fifty years ago, a Lieutenant Warren, at the head of a small exploring party, approached the Black Hills. He was met near the South Fork by a friendly but firm deputation of Sioux chiefs. Pah-sap-pah was sacred. Pah-sap-pah must not be entered. All the rest of the country was open, by the courtesy of the red men, to their white brothers, but sacred land must not be profaned. Warren acquiesced, and contented himself with ascertaining the general extent and configuration of the forbidden district. When, in the fulness of time, the government entered into treaty with these Indians, Warren's policy was continued, and the Black Hills were, by a special clause, exempted from white invasion forever. According to the Indians, the place was the abode of spirits, and each tree, each rock, each dell, had its own especial *manitou* whom it were sacrilege to offend by the touch of profane hands.

For many years the treaty was respected. Then a Pawnee brought into one of the reservations a small quantity of gold dust, which he confessed to have found in the Hills.

The following spring, Custer, at the head of an expedition of one thousand two hundred men, entered into a long scout with the avowed purpose of exploring the Black Hills for indications of gold. In this he acted directly under his governmental orders. Thus was the treaty first broken.

Next year the Hills were overrun with miners, illegal miners, just as the troops had been with illegal explorers. They scattered through the wilderness in vast numbers, and about a hundred of them staked out, near the centre of the Southern Hills, a town which they named Custer City. The irony was uncon-

scious. What followed was farcical, and was relished as such by the participants. Bodies of troops were sent to enforce the treaty. Legally they did so. Although inferior in numbers to the miners, and no better armed, they succeeded several times in sweeping all the trespassers together into one band. The latter submitted good-naturedly. The culprits were then turned over to civil authority. Civil authority waited only for the disappearance of the troops to set the miners at liberty; whereupon they scurried, as fast as their animals could carry them, back to the prospect-holes of their choice. It was all a huge joke, and everybody knew it.

In the meantime the Indians were becoming restive. It may not be known to the general reader, but it is a fact, that one of the strongest virtues of the red man's character is his fidelity to his given word. A liar is, in his moral code, the most despised of men. He cannot conceive the possibility of broken faith, and there are recorded instances wherein an Indian condemned to capital punishment has been set free on his oral promise to return for his hanging; and he has returned. Therefore the Sioux could not understand the infraction of the treaty.

They had viewed with alarm the scouting expedition by Custer. On the invasion by the horde of miners, the following spring, an outbreak was only avoided by the prompt action of the troops in evicting the trespassers; but now, this winter of 1875, the more sagacious of the Indian leaders were beginning to suspect the truth, namely, that the eviction had been nothing but a form, and that Pah-sap-pah, in spite of the treaty, was lost to them forever. Affairs were ripe for

a great Indian war; and, realizing this, the department set on foot Crook's and Reynolds' unfortunate expedition toward the Big Horn.

The savages at once began to gather under a famous chief, Sitting Bull. The storm rumbled, and Custer was despatched to effect a junction with his brother officers somewhere north of the Hills.

VIII

THE MAKING OF A HOSTILE

MEANWHILE a personal animus had sprung up against that general because of a mild stroke of justice on his part against a singularly proud man.

It seems that the personnel of Custer's former expedition to the Yellowstone included two civilians, a Dr. Honzinger and a Mr. Baliran. These men were not, of course, subject to the full rigor of military discipline, and so were accustomed to depart from, and return to, the main line of march at will. When they did not reappear in due time from one of these little trips, search was made; and they were found killed with arrows. Dr. Honzinger's skull was crushed in, but neither man was scalped, for the doctor was bald and the other wore his hair clipped short. Some time later, knowledge of the murderer's identity came to light, through information stumbled upon by one of Custer's own scouts.

At that period, rations and ammunition were distributed regularly at the various agencies. In return the savages promised to be good Indians and to submit to the white men's laws. This promise they kept faithfully enough, but according to their own standards. At the times of distribution, when inevitably a great many of the Indians were gathered together, the occasion was signalized by feasting and ghost dances. The latter are uncouth exhibitions enough,

consisting decoratively of much cheap body-paint, many eagle feathers, and trashy jewelry; musically of most unmusical pounding and screaming; and physically of a crouching posture and a solemnly bounding progression from one foot to the other around a circle. They are accompanied by a recital of valorous deeds.

Such a dance was organized at the Standing Rock Agency, below Fort Lincoln, in the winter of 1875. As usual, besides the gathering of old warriors and squaws, assembled to watch the dance, the audience included a number of white men, present on business or pleasure. Among them was Charley Reynolds, one of Custer's scouts. This man stood exchanging idle comment and chaff with another scout, and throwing an occasional glance in the direction of the vortex of dancers, swirling about in gaudy confusion, like a whirlwind of autumn leaves. Suddenly he closed his mouth with a snap and leaned forward at keen attention. He had caught a few words that interested him.

The dancers had reached the point of frenzy. They leaped forward with solemnity still, but it was a quivering solemnity held in leash. Their bodies were tense, and the trailing knives and hatchets trembled with nervous force. Each warrior, nostrils distended and eyes flashing, was declaiming his deeds with an ecstasy that bordered on madness, rolling out tale after tale of murder, theft of horses—the only sort of theft countenanced by the Indian code—and fortitude under suffering. Noticeable among these dancers was a young warrior painted in the manner of the Uncpapa Sioux. He was of magnificent physique and striking countenance, but the most remarkable feature of his appear-

ance was a huge, ragged scar across the muscles of his back. When the scout looked toward him, he was shaking in the air the chain of a watch, and declaiming at the top of his voice in the Sioux language.

"And he was great in body," he chanted, "and he fell, and I killed him with a stone, and the other fled, and I shot him, and so they died! I killed them! I am a great warrior, for I killed two white men, and these things are tokens that I speak the truth!"

He rattled the chain, and went through a vivid pantomime of the slaying of the two white men. Charley Reynolds recognized the trinket as belonging to Dr. Honzinger.

The young warrior was called Rain-in-the-Face, and he was at that time esteemed as the bravest of the northern Sioux. Others, such as Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull, might have been greater in generalship, but neither had the Uncpapa youth's reputation for sheer personal bravery. In the sun dance he had hung for four hours. The incisions behind the great muscles of the back, through which the rope was threaded, had been cut too deep, and the flesh failed to give way when Rain-in-the-Face was suspended. For some time he hung in midair, his whole weight depending from the loops of torn muscles, the blood streaming over his limbs, and the hot sun beating down upon him. Then the chiefs attempted to cut him down, but Rain-in-the-Face refused to permit it. Four hours later the flesh rent away from his bones, and he fell. That day made him the idol of the Sioux nation.

Charley Reynolds lost no time in informing Custer of his discovery, for the policy of the period was to punish as many culprits as possible, in order that the

whites might establish, as soon as might be, a moral as well as military supremacy over the turbulent savages. The commander resolved to arrest Rain-in-the-Face. To that end he detailed a hundred men under Captain Yates.

Contrary to what one unused to the Indian character might expect, no difficulty was anticipated in finding the culprit. To be sure, the plains were broad and the hiding places many, but Rain-in-the-Face was at once an agency Indian and a reckless man. He drew his rations and he drew them boldly. With his blanket wrapped about him and his rifle peeping from its folds across his left arm, he stalked here and there among the agency's few buildings. Any distribution day at the reservation would discover him there.

But, on the other hand, the captain was not at all sure of being able to arrest him when found. A hundred men would stand but small chance in a fight with six hundred well-armed savages; whereas the appearance of a larger expedition would serve merely to frighten every agency Indian out into the wilds. The situation was not encouraging. How not to alarm the quarry, and how still to possess strength enough to seize it, was the problem that confronted Captain Yates.

His first move may seem, when cursorily examined, most unwise. He detailed a lieutenant and forty of his little command, whose orders were to proceed farther down the river, ostensibly for the purpose of making inquiries concerning three Osage Indians wanted for murder. Thus his available force was reduced to sixty, and with that handful he intended to capture and take away, in the face of ten times the

number, one of the most popular fighting men of the Sioux nation.

But, as a matter of fact, in so dividing his forces the captain was correct in his tactics. He realized that surprise was his only effective weapon, and his ruse made surprise certain by lulling any suspicion as to the object of the expedition.

Arrived at the agency, a cursory examination disclosed the fact that Rain-in-the-Face was not among the groups of Indians camped on the prairie. He must, therefore, be inside the agency building itself. Captain Yates distributed his men near the little structure, and Colonel Tom Custer went inside with half a dozen soldiers.

The room was found to be full of blanketed Sioux warriors, muffled to the eyes, indistinguishable in the half light, except as eagle-feathered silhouettes. Greetings were exchanged, pipes filled, and a grave silence fell on the little group. The minutes passed, but no one moved. The atmosphere was dense with smoke, and still the parties watched each other—the whites with veiled eagerness, the Indians with unsuspicious stolidity. Finally the agent piled dry wood on the fire, and the blaze leaped up the chimney. The heat became oppressive, so after a moment the warrior nearest the fireplace threw back the blanket from his shoulders. It was Rain-in-the-Face himself.

On this rather dramatic disclosure, one of the troopers uttered an exclamation. The Indian, always suspicious, at once leaped back and cocked his rifle; but before he could raise the piece or pull the trigger, Colonel Custer wound his arms around him from behind. The other Indians rushed from the room.

The captive's hands were tied as rapidly as possible, but by the time he was brought to the door, the Indians were running angrily from all directions toward the building.

Captain Yates had succeeded in intimidating the first comers by a show of force, but he was soon outnumbered and a struggle seemed imminent.

However, an old chieftain began to declaim in the violent, high-pitched monotone so much affected by Indian orators. This delay afforded the soldier a much needed respite, but it tended also to concerted action later. The white man seized his opportunity. Through the interpreter he called upon the chiefs to stand forward for a parley.

"My brothers will hear me," said the interpreter for him, "because it is right, for they wear the Great Father's blankets and his food is in their bellies. This young warrior is brave and his enemies are as the feeble wind to him. But his eye became blinded. He thought he saw before him the Pawnees, the enemies of his people; but they were old men of my race. He killed those old men, and now the Great Father would know why. He must tell the Great Father of his blindness. Therefore it is well that he should go.

"So restrain your young men and I will restrain mine. It might be that your young men would kill many of mine; and it might be that my young men would kill many of yours. But why kill them? It is useless, for first of all, by my hand, this young warrior would die."

At the advance of the chiefs, the Sioux warriors had suddenly, from the wildest confusion, calmed to the deepest attention. They stood motionless against the

white background of the snow, only their fierce eyes rolling from the speaker to their own chiefs and back again. One of the latter replied—

"It is not well to talk so," he said brusquely. "The words of my brother are idle words and mean nothing. My young men are many, and yours are few; yet shall your young men go unharmed if you give to us our warrior."

He swept his blanket over his shoulder with a sudden gesture, and scowled. For answer Captain Yates drew from its holster his army revolver and presented it at Rain-in-the-Face's breast. The Sioux looked far away beyond the horizon, but his nostrils dilated.

"It is well," said the chief hastily, "for my brother's words are words of wisdom. Take *two* warriors to the Great Father, but leave us this young man, that he may teach us that blindness is not wise."

In answer to his gesture two Indian youths stepped forward, proud of the distinction.

"See," went on the chief, "these shall go with your young men, and all will be well."

Yates lowered his pistol, and turned.

"Tell him," he said to the interpreter, "that this man goes with us. If I see the muzzle of a rifle, I'll shoot him dead."

The savages listened gravely. Their first burst of rage had passed, and, as always with their race, they were loath to engage in a stand-up fight in cold blood. The Indian is brave enough, but he likes to be brave in his own way. The chief turned and waved his hand. Ten minutes later bands of savages were speeding swiftly away in all directions, and the agency was entirely deserted.

The little command shortly after set out on its return trip. Yates fully expected to be attacked before he rejoined his chief; but although many savages were at various times visible, hurrying by, the troops arrived at Fort Lincoln in due course, and Custer stood face to face with his future slayer.

There is little need to repeat here the details of Rain-in-the-Face's captivity. It is interesting, but not of the story. He received visits from great warriors representing various tribes of the Sioux nation—Brulé, Yankton, Teton, Ogallala—all uniting to honor him. To the surprise of the few white spectators, these visitors kissed the young captive on the cheek, a mark of respect and affection almost unheard of among this savage people. Two of the younger warriors asked and received permission to share his captivity for a time. Rain-in-the-Face bore the imprisonment well; was docile, friendly, apparently happy. He had many talks with General Custer, and came to be well liked.

But he had much leisure for thought, and he was a proud man.

After some months, two white men, grain thieves, were placed in the same guard house. Being enterprising pioneers, they promptly sawed a hole and escaped. Rain-in-the-Face availed himself of the opening.

Once under the open sky, he adjusted his moccasins and struck boldly across the prairie for the West. Rain-in-the-Face was no longer an agency Indian, but a hostile.

IX

THE BROTHER OF GODS

RAIN-IN-THE-FACE had no very definite idea of where he should go. The main and pressing need was to put a certain distance between himself and his pursuers as rapidly as possible.

To this end, he pushed diligently north-west in a bee line. At first he covered his trail skilfully, so that Custer's men would have to guess his direction of flight as any one of the three hundred and sixty degrees of the complete circle. After a little, this was unnecessary. It became desirable to fall in with a camp of the Sioux, in order that he might be directed to his own tribe of that people, the Uncpapa.

But as day followed day, Rain-in-the-Face owned himself puzzled. In the space of time that had elapsed since his escape, he should have encountered a dozen bands, for he was intimately acquainted with the country and with the Indian habit of life. The village sites were deserted, the plains were empty. The Indian did not know of the two expeditions, commanded respectively by Crook and Terry, which, the one from the south and the other from the north, were converging at the Big Horn; nor that in that district nearly every plains Indian had encamped, either openly allied with Sitting Bull, or near enough to become so should such a move seem expedient.

So for a week he subsisted alone as only an Indian can.

Let loose a tired pony at night on the plains, and in the morning he will turn up well fed and full of vigor. It is the same with a savage. He knows expedients for getting food, for preparing it, for combating thirst, for sleeping in bad weather with some degree of comfort, which a white man never acquires without a long and hazardous apprenticeship. It is a case of the survival of the fittest; and the Indian always survives.

Toward the end of the week, Rain-in-the-Face drew near the low hills of the Cheyenne River, in good condition, except that his moccasins were nearly worn out. Then he became aware of a camp. As beseemed a good warrior, he scouted carefully until he had satisfied himself that the lodges were those of people of his own nation. Then he allowed himself to be captured by the herd boys and escorted to Lone Wolf, the chief of the band.

Lone Wolf had been easily persuaded by Lafond that it was not good policy to join Sitting Bull. The tribe was well fed and rich. It could gain nothing by such a war, and could lose much. Now was the time to prepare against the coming winter; now, in the early summer, when the energy of the band was at its flood. War it had enjoyed but recently with the Pawnees; so the hearts of the young men were big with valor. Let them equally enjoy the chase, the other branch of a brave's education.

These, and a hundred like reasons, Lafond had urged so plausibly that the chief had come, without difficulty, to his way of thinking. After all, why not at least await the plum season, and the great gathering of prairie chickens which was invariably consequent on

the ripening of the fruit? With that plan in view, the warrior had moved his band and all its household goods to the banks of the Cheyenne, where he settled down peaceably to a season of plenty. There Rain-in-the-Face found him.

The camp had been pitched, after the usual rambling manner, in a broad grass park of sandy subsoil, below hills on which wandered the ponies in times of safety, or lurked the sentinels in time of danger. Above the lodges, like blazoned arms, were suspended the spears and shields of the warriors, and before the open flap of each the owner could be seen sprawled in dignified idleness among his favorite squaws. Children sat grave and silent near at hand, or whirled in mimic and noisy warfare farther out over the prairie. Dogs skulked here and there. Kettles above shallow fire holes bubbled and steamed. About over the ground was strewn the indescribable litter of a long-used camp. Through the early summer air rose shrill laughter, the sounds of good-natured chaff, the yelp of dogs and the hum of lower conversation; for, no matter how shy or stoical an Indian may seem before strangers, he is sociable enough among his own people. Near the centre of the village stood the lodge of Lone Wolf. At his hand sat Michaïl Lafond.

The half-breed had in the past two years reverted almost to the type of his more savage parent. His hair was long and worn loose, after the Sioux fashion. The upper part of his body was naked. About his neck hung a string of bears' claws. Paint streaked his countenance. White buckskin leggings, ornamented with beads, covered his legs. Only the shifty character of his eye and a certain finer modelling of the bold lines

of his face differentiated him from the full-blooded Sioux at his side. The two were conversing in the Sioux language.

To them the boys brought their stranger. From various directions squaws and children sidled nearer for a look. The warriors, disdaining such an exhibition of womanish curiosity, remained placidly smoking in the sunshine. Near at hand the sounds of laughter and of conversation died, and the solemnity of ceremony fell.

As he approached, the stranger raised his right hand, palm forward, in token of peace, and then drew the edge of the same hand across his throat from left to right. This latter is the " sign " of the Sioux, and thus Lone Wolf was made aware that he received one of his own nation. Lone Wolf inclined slightly, and raised his hand with the peace gesture. The three then sat and the inevitable pipe was produced.

Thus Rain-in-the-Face was received with all ceremony. Later, the first dip into the kettle of boiling meat was conceded him, and in that manner he was made free of Lone Wolf's lodge. No question was asked as to his identity, and he vouchsafed no information; that would come later, when the warriors gathered for a formal powwow.

And in the meantime, Michaïl Lafond's roving French eyes took in every detail of the stranger's appearance, and his keen French mind drew its own conclusions. Near the close of the afternoon, he left his seat and addressed the stranger.

" My brother knows ponies," said he. " Will he look upon one of mine? "

It was equivalent to an invitation to call. The savage

arose and stalked by the half-breed's side in the direction of Lafond's fine lodge of whitened skins. As they approached, two young squaws glided away. Lafond spoke a word to one of them, and a moment later the boys of the camp raced eagerly in the direction of the band of ponies on the hill.

The lodge of Michaïl Lafond stood just beyond the village proper and on a slight elevation. The entire camp lay spread out before it, a panorama to be seized by a single sweep of the eye.

The savage paused for a moment before entering the doorway, and looked about him with a little envy. Never had he visited a band so well supplied with ponies, so efficiently armed, so wealthy in robes and lodges and kettles and all the other articles of Indian wealth which go to make up prosperity. Lafond watched him closely. The Indian turned inside the doorway, and sat down on a heavily furred buffalo skin near the entrance. In the background wallowed a dim confusion of skins, robes, and utensils. Lafond placed himself beside his guest and the pipe was lighted.

The stir following the stranger's arrival had lulled. The women and children, having satisfied their curiosity as to his personal appearance, returned to their wonted occupations, so that once again the mingled noises of the camp rose from the little valley.

In a moment the young squaw led up a pony. The animal was fine above the average. Its limbs were deer-like in delicacy, its nostrils were wide, its neck slender and tapering—quite in contrast to the ordinary Indian pony's clumsiness in this respect—and, above all, it was marked black and white in the *pinto* fashion. This last is considered to indicate superior spirit and is much

prized. The woman had twisted pieces of bright-colored cloth and eagle feathers into the mane and tail.

At the sight of so beautiful an animal, the stranger exclaimed in delight.

"It pleases my brother?" inquired Lafond politely. "It is his."

The squaw led the beast forward, touching the young warrior's hand with the end of the halter in token of proprietorship. Lafond rose and closed the tent flap. The noises of the camp were at once muffled, and twilight fell.

"My brother is a great warrior," he began after a moment, "yet he has need of ponies, for he comes on foot and his moccasins are worn."

The stranger, impassive but watchful, made no answer.

"My brother has come far?" went on Lafond cunningly.

"Far," repeated the youth politely.

"His eyes have seen the waters of the Great River?"

The savage bowed.

"Perhaps his pony was lost there?"

"It may be."

"The sight of the white man frightened him and he was drowned?"

The Indian's eyes flashed.

"It may be so."

"On his back my brother bears great scars," said Lafond suddenly after a short pause; "but they are the scars of a brave man. He bears other scars on his face; they are the scars of shame."

He ceased abruptly at the stranger's fierce ejaculation. The Indian seemed about to spring on him.

"But," the half-breed went on in haste, "my brother will destroy the shame, and the scars will go." He leaned forward and touched the savage lightly on his bare shoulder. "They are the scars from the white man's prison," he said.

For a moment the stranger's face was a study in livid hate. Then all expression died from it, leaving it stolid as before.

The half-breed smoked in silence. His surmises had been correct. This was indeed the young hero of the sun dance, the news of whose imprisonment had, by chance, come to his ears but a short time before. He considered. Finally, he turned to his guest once more.

"My brother has travelled many miles," he said. "Tell me, has he seen the lodges of his people?"

"The prairies have been waste."

"I will tell you why. The great white war chief has gone with his young men beyond Pah-sap-pah. There the warriors will strike him and destroy him. My brother's people are there."

The hate came back into the Indian's face with a flash. He fingered the haft of a knife that lay near his hand.

"I will join my people," he said.

"And aid them. It is well. But will my brother go alone and without arms?"

"What would you?" replied the Indian bitterly. "Am I a chief that I should go attended? Do arrows and rifles grow on the prairies?"

The half-breed craftily permitted another impressive but momentary silence to fall.

"But if my brother were to ride with a hundred

fighting men; on his own pony; with a rifle in his hand—would not that be more in accord with his dignity as a brave warrior?" he suggested suddenly.

"Where are a hundred such?"

Lafond arose and pulled aside the flap of the tent. The camp lay in the half glow as a flat picture, and its noise burst in through the open doorway like a blare of music. The Indian's expressive eyes flashed comprehension.

"And if they go?" he asked.

"I, too, have enemies," replied Lafond.

Rain-in-the-Face smoked meditatively. If this man held the power to sway thus the policy of the camp, why did he not use it to crush the enemies of whom he had spoken? What added force could a young, unarmed stranger bring him that would compensate for the trouble and expense to which he was putting himself?

Lafond saw the hesitation and dreaded aright.

"My enemies dwell in Pah-sap-pah," said he simply.

In that sentence he exposed the weakness of his position. Pah-sap-pah was sacred, so sacred that for many years miners fled to it as to a sanctuary, certain that once within its dark border pursuit would cease. Hunts in it were undertaken only at certain times of the year, and under peculiar auspices. War died into peace when it dashed against those sombre cliffs. The winds in the trees were voices of Soulless Ones, bewailing always their fate; the frown of sun-red Harney—or the peak afterward known under that name—was instinct with the brooding wrath of some great manitou, who slept lightly only when his children disturbed him not. Even the powerful influence of Michaïl La-

fond had failed to induce Lone Wolf to enter the Black Hills on an errand of murder.

But the name of Rain-in-the-Face was one to conjure with in just such matters as these. He was not only a brave man and a great warrior, but he was favored of the gods. In the belief of the Sioux nation, his wonderful endurance in the sun dance was at once evidence and warranty of it. Without divine favor he could not have endured so long; enduring so long had brought to him great abundance of divine favor. So, without actually professing to be a medicine man, he had freely accorded to him all the confidence a member of the priestcraft usually enjoys. If Lafond could induce Rain-in-the-Face to lead, the warriors of the band would follow blindly, even into Pah-sap-pah itself.

The Indian started as he caught the import of Lafond's words.

"My brother has looked upon the face of the angry Manitou," went on Lafond eagerly; "and he has not been afraid. He has danced the dance of death, and the great Manitou has stretched out his hand and held him up. My brother is favored of the Great Spirit, and he is not afraid."

"It is Pah-sap-pah," replied the Indian sombrely.

"Yes, it is Pah-sap-pah, and Pah-sap-pah is sacred. In Pah-sap-pah are two men, and they go here and there breaking her rocks, cutting her trees, defiling her streams. They profane the spirits. On the clouds of the mountain Gitche Manitou frowns because his children permit it. 'Why comes not one to take these away?' he says. 'My children have forgotten me.'"

"Gitche Manitou is great," said Rain-in-the-Face thoughtfully. "Why does he not destroy his enemies?"

" Gitche Manitou destroys through his chosen. Destroy *thou*, and it will be Gitche Manitou who destroys through thy hand."

The wily half-breed had caught this doctrine of the Jesuit in his old north country home, and his crafty use of it impressed its force strongly on the savage's mind. Lafond proceeded—

" And who more fitted than Rain-in-the-Face? "

The Indian glanced at him with new respect at this knowledge of his name.

" For he stands near to the Great Spirit, and the warriors will follow him."

The half-breed paused, pretending to consider the difficulties.

" The men are but two and there is a woman. There are here a hundred warriors, and each warrior has a gun and much powder. When the profane ones have been destroyed, then Rain-in-the-Face will turn northward and enter the camp of Sitting Bull at the head of many fighting men. It little beseems so great a warrior of the Uncpapas to go begging a rifle from the Tetons! "

The mind of Rain-in-the-Face, thus relieved of some degree of its superstitious fear, lay fully open to this last appeal to his pride. He picked up his pipe and puffed stolidly on it twice.

" The enemies of my brother shall die," said he.

Before the formal conference of that evening, Michaïl Lafond had arranged to carry out his side of the bargain. He had done this very simply. After the conversation in the lodge he had gone to Lone Wolf.

" The stranger is Rain-in-the-Face, of the Uncpapas," said he. " He is pleased with our warriors and he wishes to lead them against the great white war

chief near the Big Horn. There are also strangers in Pah-sap-pah whom it is the will of Gitche Manitou that Rain-in-the-Face should destroy, and he desires your help."

Lone Wolf was delighted. That so famous a warrior should choose his band was honor enough to repay any effort.

In all this transaction, the offices of Michaïl Lafond could easily have been dispensed with. If Lone Wolf had gone to Rain-in-the-Face and said, " Behold, here are my young men. Lead them," the latter would have accepted the tender with joy. If, on the other hand, the stranger had merely announced his identity to Lone Wolf, that chieftain would gladly have furnished him with everything he needed. But each was in the dark as to one fact, of which Lafond had knowledge. Rain-in-the-Face did not suspect how his imprisonment had increased his importance, nor did he know that the deep content which brooded over Lone Wolf's camp was only apparent, and had been carefully fostered by Lafond. Nor did Lone Wolf recognize Rain-in-the-Face, nor realize how anxious the youth was for an escort to uphold his pride. It was by seeing little things of this sort, and acting upon them, that the half-breed had gained so much influence.

Four days later, Lone Wolf's camp swept northwestward toward the Big Horn Mountain. On the 25th of June, Rain-in-the-Face confronted General Custer, on a knoll near the river of the Little Big Horn. A great battle was all but over, and the few remaining troopers, their last cartridges gone, were fighting desperately with sabres.

The savage shot the white man through the heart.

X

THE PRICE OF A CLAIM

ALL through this time of dread and danger, of plot and counterplot and intrigue, of brooding war and half-awakened pillage, the doctor went on peacefully collecting his funny little statistics, utterly oblivious to everything but their accumulation and arrangement. Every morning of the warmer months he went out into the hills for the day. There he would grub about among his ledges and leads, pecking away at the rocks with his little hand pick, filling his canvas bags, jotting down notes and statistics in his notebook.

During its progress he was blind to everything but his work. One day, as he walked along the top of a ridge, a huge bear rose up in his path. The doctor politely lifted his hat and passed to one side. The decline of the sun alone he noticed. When the shadow of Harney crept out to him he turned toward home. As he neared the log cabin his placid eyes fairly beamed through his spectacles. When he came in sight of it he ran forward, his specimen bags swinging heavily against his legs, caught up the child stumbling to meet him and carried her, laughing and struggling, to the woman in the doorway. Then they had supper all together—bacon, or perhaps game, with vegetables from the garden, and corn bread. Occasionally they had white bread and coffee, and always fresh water from the cold mountain creek. After supper the doctor went

outdoors to arrange his specimens and plot out his notes as long as the daylight lasted. His wife moved about inside softly. After a time she brought out the little girl in her nightdress to be kissed. So the twilight neared, and the long day was done.

As the yellow glow crept down, she came outdoors too, and sat pensively looking over the peaks of the lower mountains to the distant Cheyenne and the prairies. Beyond them was the East. There were cities and books and other women and the beat of human life in the air. Here was a still, lonely grandeur that even the wind in the pines did not relieve.

The doctor finally had to put aside his work for lack of light, and sat at her feet leaning against the logs of the cabin. She looked down on his little figure, his round shoulders, his forehead even now abstract and wrinkled with speculation, his kindly blue eyes, his sensitive mouth, and then she softly reached out and took his hand. The two sat there until the moon rose over the Bad Lands. Then they went inside. In moments such as this the woman lived.

In winter time the doctor sat near the fireplace, writing by the candlelight on his great book. She was in the shadow, looking at him with tenderness, smiling wearily at the eager quivering of his chin, and rocking gently back and forth. The little girl played demurely on the floor within the circle of firelight, her curls falling down on her forehead. She piled up her blocks, and occasionally, as one would fall, she would look up in deprecation of her mother's hush. The golden heads of the mother and child were like sunshine before the dark walls of the cabin. Against them the firelight gleamed. Outside, the thin, light snow

drifted fitfully by the pane. The doctor wrote. The woman watched in patience. The child played.

As spring came on, the doctor got out into the hills again.

One day he came back and found the woman murdered and the child gone. The cabin was ransacked from one end to the other, but no attempt had been made to fire it.

The doctor put his specimen bags methodically in their places, and then sat down by his dead wife.

At evening some passing miners found him there holding her hand. With some difficulty, and by the exercise of a gentle force, they persuaded him to rise, after which they tenderly laid the body on a couch, concealing as best they might the red tonsure where the scalp had been. They set the cabin in order and cooked supper from the provisions in their wagon. The doctor ate and drank in silence, making no sign when the men spoke to him.

After supper he went outside and began to arrange his specimens. When darkness fell he came in, stood undecided for a moment, and then lay down on a bear-skin, Jim's gift, and slept.

The men looked at one another in a puzzled way, conversing in low tones. Soon they too rolled themselves up and went to sleep on the floor.

Early in the morning Jim Buckley came down the gulch with part of a deer. The men told him the news hurriedly, between mouthfuls of coffee. Jim looked at the dead woman with a hardening of the mouth and a softening of the eyes; then he went out and for the first time took the doctor's hand.

When they had finished breakfast, the men made a rough bier of willow branches plaited, on which they

gently laid the body. Two went down to the soft earth by the creek bottom and began to dig. The others followed with their burden, which they laid beside the growing excavation, and then stood with bared heads, waiting for the diggers. The doctor would not come. After a little persuasion they left him sitting on the ground, leaning against the logs of the cabin, looking out over the bluffs of the Cheyenne to the east.

The men in the trench worked rapidly and skilfully, one loosening the gravel with his pick, the other shovelling it out on the grass. Suddenly the latter stopped in the act of tossing a shovelful. He pushed his stubby forefinger in among the gravel for a moment and drew out an irregular bit of metal. It was gold.

They buried the young wife elsewhere, and staked out the claim, and others, lying along the creek.

So Prue slept quietly at last. Her little life was drab-colored in spite of the lights of adventure and drama that had played over it. It contained a great love and a great sacrifice. So little of the gold would have made her happy, and yet all the wealth of these new placers could not have saved her at the last!

A rider dashed up to them at the cabin, bringing news of the outbreak. It was directed to the towns of the North, and had only brushed Spanish Gulch on its destroying way. The men camped on the site of the new placer. They built cradles and pumped water down from Spanish Creek, so that in a little time the gulch contained quite a town. The first discovery is known as the Doctor's Claim, and so you can find it recorded in the records of Pennington County to-day. It turned out to be very rich.

And as for the doctor—he died.

XI

THE BEGINNING OF LAFOND'S REVENGE

THE day following the conference, Lone Wolf struck camp. The squaws quickly removed and rolled into convenient bundles the skin coverings of the tepees. The poles of the latter were strapped on each side of the ponies in such a manner that, their ends dragging on the ground, a sort of litter was formed for the transportation of the household goods and the younger children. Before the sun was an hour high, the caravan was under way.

From this, the South Fork of the Cheyenne, the main band, under Lone Wolf, were to push directly through to the Big Horn. Lafond, Rain-in-the-Face, and the warriors detailed for the expedition were to carry out the adventure of Pah-sap-pah to the half-breed's satisfaction, and were then to rejoin the main body as soon as possible.

The smaller band cut in to the Black Hills shortly after daybreak one morning. It rode up Spanish Gulch a little before noon.

Most of these warriors had never before entered the dark limits of Pah-sap-pah. They were plainly in awe of its frowning cliffs and rustling pines. They rode close together, whispering uneasily. Even Rain-in-the-Face failed to reassure them. Why should he? He was a little afraid himself.

Lafond's knowledge of the topography of the place was excellent. He had visited it several times. He

had watched the doctor, step by step, throughout a long day of geological searching. He knew Jim Buckley's dwelling, where he worked, what hours he kept, and just how late he sat up at night. Innumerable times he had viewed the doctor, Prue, and the scout through the buck-horn sights of his long rifle; yet he had never been even tempted to pull the trigger. Why? Because he was a Latin, and so theatrical effects were dear to him; because he was an Indian, and so revenge with him seemed to lie not so much in the mere infliction of injury as in the victim's realization that he was being come up with. Lafond not only wanted the doctor and his companions to be killed, but he wanted them to know why they were killed, and by whom. It was finer to be able thus to do the thing with all the stage settings. The dramatic instinct was part of the barbaric quality of his nature, like a love for red.

So Lafond had let slip innumerable opportunities of picking off his victims single-handed, merely to gain the local knowledge necessary to a final *coup de théâtre*. Consequently, he knew where the cabin was situated, and quickly scouted the state of affairs. The coast was clear. He gave the required signal; the savages silently approached on foot, and they entered the little house together.

Now at this time of year, in the Black Hills, there occurs a daily meteorological phenomenon of a rather peculiar character. The hot air from the prairies sweeps over from the Missouri River, crossing a number of lesser streams in its passage, until it strikes the slope of the hills. There it is deflected upward, gradually becoming colder as the elevation rises, until, at

the barrier of Harney, it gathers in rain clouds. These are at first mere wisps of down, streaming in ragged ribbons from the peak; but with incredible rapidity they gain in density and extent, until they spread over a considerable area of the surrounding country. Then they empty themselves in a terrific deluge of water and hail, accompanied by thunderclaps so reverberant that they seem to arise from the rending of the hills themselves. After this short crisis, the dismembered clouds float out over the prairie and are dissipated in the hot air, even before they reach the first white turrets of the Bad Lands.

So rapidly does the storm gather and break, that there is but a short half hour between the morning and the afternoon clearness of the skies. To those who have never experienced this phenomenon, it is startling in the extreme; to those who have, it is a matter of seeking temporary shelter until the disturbance blows over. In any case, the first indications are but scant warning.

By the time the little band of Indians had reached the doctor's cabin, the first wisps of cloud were clinging to Harney. While they were in the house, the blackness gathered and loomed and darkened until the sun was obscured and the western hills lost themselves in rain.

The doctor was in the hills. Prue was making the bed in the little bedroom, and little Miss Prue was asleep on a rug in one corner of the larger apartment. The savages stole in with noiseless, moccasined feet behind the stooping woman. Lafond, forgetting in his excitement everything but the lust of killing, stabbed her deeply twice in the broad of the back. She fell

forward on the bed without a murmur, and the murderer, seizing the knob of her hair, circled her brow with his knife's edge, and ripped loose the scalp. Then they all glided back into the other room.

Three of the savages took from the wood box near the crude fireplace some of the dried kindling with which Jim Buckley had supplied the family, and began to build a little wigwam-shaped pyramid against the side of the wall. Others moved about furtively, prying here and there for possible plunder. They preserved absolute silence, for the superstitious terror of the place was working on them, and they had begun to experience that panic-like tremor which seems to create an invisible clutch ready to seize from behind.

Even the encouraging presence of Rain-in-the-Face was not potent enough to prevent this. Out on the plains the personality of the man had loomed large, but here the legend was greater than he. The warriors felt the imminence of the frowning, brooding manitou of Harney; they almost heard the moaned syllables of the Soulless Ones' complaint. Their movements were those of timid mice, advancing a little, hesitating much, ready to flee in panic.

Not so Lafond. He strode roughly over to the corner where the child lay. In his mind, with new vividness, burned that old picture of his humiliation. He began to realize, now that the patient repression of his hate was over, how potent it had been. Alfred and Billy Knapp were out of his reach for the present, but here were the others ready to his hand. He seized little Prue by the hair of her head.

The child, thus suddenly awakened, screamed violently, shriek upon shriek, as her terror became more

fully conscious of the savage and his bloody knife. About the room the warriors paused nervously. Accustomed enough to screams of this sort, they were now dominated by superstition and were thrown off their wonted balance.

And then a fearful thing occurred. Before their eyes, in the open door, groped and staggered the woman Lafond had stabbed but a moment before. From the red raw surface of her scalp blood streamed —streamed over the remaining fringe of her hair, matting it down; streamed down into her eyes, blinding them; over her drawn countenance; over the dabbled, sticky, clinging fabric of her garment, reddened still more by the pulsing flood from the two great wounds in her body. Her breast heaved painfully, the breath coming and going with a strange bubbling gurgle. Her face was turned upward almost to the ceiling above in the agony of her endeavor. Her little hands, become waxen, clutched and unclutched the side of the door. The child screamed yet again, mercifully hidden from this awful sight by the intervention of Lafond's body. The woman made a supreme effort to advance, plunged forward, and rolled over and over on the cabin floor.

At the same instant, with a shriek of wind and a roar of rain, the voice of the thunder spoke.

The savages, who had watched with strained eyes this resurrection from the dead, yelled in an ecstasy of superstitious terror and rushed for the door.

Lafond, utterly unmoved, called to them in Indian and swore at them in French, but they were gone. He hesitated for a moment in evident indecision as to what should be done next. Then he rapidly bundled the

little girl in a blanket and threw her across his shoulder. As he hurried to the door, he paused for a moment over the motionless heap of blood and rags on the floor, coolly thrusting his knife again and again into the unresisting flesh.

He caught the fugitives only below the cañon of Iron Creek. They had made no pause until well out of the hills, and were still shaking with superstitious dread. Even Rain-in-the-Face, bold and self-confident as he was, had yielded to the panic; nor could the persuasions, threats or ridicule of the half-breed induce them to return.

For a time Lafond was of two minds as to his own course in the matter. Should he leave things as they were for the present or should he return alone to complete the work? Finally he decided on the former. The Gallic love of the spectacular again intervened; besides, he was possessed of a certain large feeling that the world was not wide enough to save his victims from him when he should judge the time fit. He found much joy in gloating over what he imagined the two men would say, do, and think when they returned to the cabin. And he was a good deal of a savage. He looked forward with fierce delight to the great battle which he foresaw would soon take place between Sitting Bull and his white enemies. So he rode on with the little band of warriors to overtake Lone Wolf.

The savages plainly could not understand his encumbering himself with the child. The custom had always been to seize such a victim by the ankles, whirl it once about the head to get a good swing, and then to dash its skull violently against a bowlder. They saw no reason why the rule should be departed from in

this case. Neither did Lafond; but the queer, zigzag intuition of the half-breed had caused him to feel dimly that he should preserve the child, and as he was in the habit of gratifying his whims, he proceeded to carry out his intention in this case. Once his decision was expressed in emphatic form, his companions acquiesced. The child was Michaïl's captive; with his own captive he could work his will. That is the Indian code.

So little Miss Prue was carried for seven days on the back of a horse. She did not cry much, and this saved her from violence. Her two years of outdoor life had made her constitution robust, and this helped her in inevitable privation. At the end of the week, the band caught up with Lone Wolf and his camp, and Miss Prue was given over into the care of Lafond's two young squaws. With them she underwent the customary two days' jealousy, and then entered fully into the heritage of kindliness which every Indian woman squeezes, drop by drop, from her arid life and lavishes on the creatures who are gentle with her.

She had, to be sure, to learn the Indian virtues of silence and obedience. She had to do the little tasks that are set to girl babies everywhere among the savage tribes. And, above all, she had to learn to endure. But, in recompense, the two Indian women adored her. They decked her out in beaded work and white buckskin; they put bright feathers in her hair and bright beads about her little neck; they saved choice bits for her from the family kettle; and when night came they lay on either side of her and softly stroked her hair as she slept. Over her head, among others, hung her mother's scalp.

XII

THE LEOPARD AND HIS SPOTS

IT is not the purpose of this story to describe the battle of the Little Big Horn in detail. That has been done many times. There is little about it that is remarkable, excepting always the heroism of the men who fought so desperately. The scene itself must have been impressive, as viewed by the non-combatants of the Indians from the bluffs near at hand—the swirl of brown about the melting patch of blue. After Custer fell, the savages turned eagerly down the valley to attack Reno, leaving the dead as they lay. Lafond did not accompany them. The sight had aroused certain reflections in his breast, and he wished to work the thing out.

After sunset, he went alone and on foot over to the battlefield. The troopers lay as they had fallen—first, Calhoun's company in line, with its officers in place; then Keogh's; finally, on the knoll, the remnant, scattered irregularly among the dead of their enemies. In the cold light their faces shone white and still, even yet instinct with the eagerness of battle; an eagerness which death had transmuted from flesh to marble. Near the centre lay Custer, his long yellow hair framing his face, his hands crossed on his breast. He alone was unmutilated, save by the shot that had taken his life.

The half-breed did not hesitate on the outer circle of the combat, but picked his way among the corpses

until he stood on the summit of the little knoll. Then he folded his arms and looked steadily down on the white man's inscrutable face.

Whatever might be Lafond's intellectual or moral deficiencies, lack of perspicacity was not among them. Through the red glory of this apparent victory, the most sweeping ever accomplished by the plains Indians, he saw clearly the imminence of final defeat. The dead man before him lay smiling, and Lafond perceived that he smiled because he saw his people arising to avenge him. The beat of the muster drum calling the avengers to the frontier now sounded in prophecy to his hearing, and the echoes of the last battle shot merged into the clang of an iron civilization, which was destined to push these exulting victors dispassionately aside. It was a striking picture of light and of shadow —this dark, savage figure silhouetted against the softened brightness of the sky, this bright-haired warrior lying bathed in the glorification of a Western night; the white man humiliated, defeated, slain, but seeing with closed eyes that at which he smiled with deep content; the savage, proud in success, triumphant, victor, but perceiving somehow, in the very evidences of his achievement, that which made him knit his brows. How little was this great victory against the background of the people whom it had outraged, and yet how mightily it would stir that people when once it became known!

Michaïl Lafond the savage stood before the body of Custer the fallen, for an hour, moving not one muscle all the time. At the end of the hour Michaïl Lafond the civilized turned slowly away, and walked thoughtfully toward the lodges on the other bank of the Little

Big Horn River. The sight of a brave man, who had died as he lived, had reformed Lafond, but whether moralists would have approved of the reformation is to be doubted.

The night ran well along toward morning. The squaws, who had been plundering and mutilating the dead, had long since returned to hear the report of the warriors who had gone to attack Reno. The attack had failed, but the fight had been desperate and the losses on both sides heavy. Six of Custer's command, captured alive, were burned to death. At last, the entire camp, with the exception of the women sentinels, had gone to rest. Toward daybreak, even these became drowsy.

Lafond arose quietly. He gathered a few necessaries into a pack, placed them outside the doorway of the lodge, hesitated a moment, and then returned. His two squaws slept, as usual, one each side of the little girl. Lafond lifted the child carefully in order that he might not awaken her guardians or herself, and wrapped her closely in his blanket. At the doorway he again hesitated. Then, chuckling grimly, he deposited the child by the bundle he had already prepared, and returning, took down from the tent pole the string of scalps which went to show how successful and how savage a warrior he had been. By the light of the stars he selected one of these and laid it carefully between the two sleeping women. It was the scalp of the little girl's mother. Then he rehung the string on the tent pole, and went outside immensely pleased with his bit of humor.

It was his good-by to the wild life. From that time on he dwelt in the towns, where in a very few years

his name became known as standing for a shrewdness in management, a keenness in seizing opportunities, and an inflexibility of purpose rarely to be met with among his Anglo-Saxon competitors. His present objective point, however, was the Spotted Tail Agency, which was, from the valley of the Little Big Horn, an affair of five days. Michaïl Lafond did it in four; or at least at the end of the fourth he was within a few miles of the agency buildings. By the evening of the third day, he had transformed both himself and the little girl into an appearance of civilization, reclothing her in the garments she had worn at the time of her capture, and himself in a complete outfit which he had collected piece by piece on that last night with the savages. The change was truly astonishing.

His last camp in the open was pitched within sight of the Spotted Tail reservation. The darkness was almost at hand. He had fed himself and the child, had put the latter to rest under one blanket and was just about to wrap himself in the other, when he became aware of a prairie schooner swaying leisurely across the plains in his direction. He at once sat up again. Every man was to him an object of suspicion.

Not until the wagon had halted within a few feet of him could he distinguish the occupant. Then he perceived that the latter was a gentle-faced, silver-haired individual of mild aspect, dressed decently but strangely, and possessed of introspective blue eyes, which he turned dreamily on Lafond.

"May I camp here?" he inquired deprecatingly.

The half-breed considered.

"I s'pose so," he said without enthusiasm.

The old man descended and uncoupled his two ani-

mals. After he had picketed them, he returned, and, extracting from the wagon body the materials for a meal, he proceeded to make himself at home over Lafond's fire.

"I never did like to camp alone," he confided to the latter.

Lafond watched him intently. No further words were exchanged until the stranger had finished his supper and had restored his kit to the wagon. Then the younger man offered the hospitality of the plains.

"Yo' smok'?" he inquired, tendering his tobacco.

"Thank you, no," replied the old man with a tone of breeding which Lafond felt but could not define.

The half-breed could not make out the newcomer, and the conversation failed to enlighten him. That was an epoch when all the world turned to the West; but it was a practical world. There one might in time meet all sorts and conditions of men, from the English lord to the turbulent Fenian; from the New York exquisite fallen on hard times to the "bad man" who had never been east of the Mississippi. One never betrayed surprise at anything one might bring ashore from this flotsam and jetsam of the human race. But all these odds and ends were at least made of tough material, strong enough to run wherever a rapid current might dash them, capable of supporting hard knocks against one another or the obstructions in the way; while this placid old man seemed to Lafond like a crystal vessel, of rare quality, perhaps, but none the less fragile. At the last he asked bluntly, "What do you here?"

The old man fell silent for a minute or two and gazed into the coals of the dying fire.

"My name is Durand," he said at last, with an infinitude of sorrow in the tones of his voice. "I am an entomologist. I am here to get specimens—butterflies; but it is not here that I belong. My place is elsewhere, and that I know. But it is not in my country, and——" he broke off. Lafond looked on curiously, for the dreamy haze had faded from the speaker's eyes. "My friend," Durand went on, "there are times when one cares not to see the face of man except in the bosom of the great nature. I do not know that you understand that. It is with the bitterness of a wrong that such knowledge comes, and with it comes the hate of cities and of the things men do. Some men have had their will of me, and I am come to the wilderness. They called it revenge to drive me here."

"Revenge! But you still live!" repeated Lafond in wonder.

"And is it that you think the taking of life is revenge?" cried Durand, with sudden energy. "They who take their revenge in killing are actually the merciful ones, and they cheat no one but themselves."

"Yes?" asked Lafond, his soul in the question.

The other turned in surprise at his companion's vehemence. He saw a stolid, dark-skinned man gazing impassively into the fire.

"They are fools," went on Durand bitterly, after a moment; "just fools. These others were of more ingenuity; they knew what would hurt, what would avenge them better than the killing."

"I do not understand," said the half-breed, feeling his way slowly, for the fear of damming this flow of confidence. He looked away, for his eye glowed, though his voice was steady. "W'at is it? If one kills, if one takes that life, w'at is worse?"

"Worse, worse?" cried Durand, flinging his hands impotently upward. "A thousand things!" He suddenly became calm, and turned to Lafond with impressive forefinger. "Listen, my friend. Life is a little thing. Anyone can take it who has a gun, or a knife, or even a stone. But the true revenge is in finding out what it is that each man prizes the most, and then taking it from him. And that requires power! power! power!

"Few there are who have not something they prize more than life," he added gloomily. The fire died from his eye. He became once again the timid old butterfly hunter, pushing blindly out into the wilderness, wondering at himself for thus exposing an old wound to a chance passer; and yet perhaps feeling in some dim fashion—so inscrutable are the instincts of these half-childish natures—that in so doing he was following for a moment the lines of greater destinies than his own.

And certainly, long after the dipper had swung below the pole star, Lafond sat staring into the ashes of the fire, just as four days since he had stared into the ashes of a brave and chivalrous life. In his history there were the two crucial hours—one after the greatest battle of the plains; the other after a dozen sentences exchanged with a half-crazy old entomologist. From the potent reflections induced by these one hundred and twenty minutes it resulted that Michaïl Lafond became civilized and a seeker for wealth in the development of the young country. In wealth he saw power; in power the ability to give or take away.

The depriving each man of that which he prizes the most!

XIII

THE DISSOLVING VIEW

WHILE things have gone on, we have conducted our business and returned each evening to our armchairs by the fire. There we have sat at ease and reviewed the world. Events have come to pass. Diplomats have quarrelled gravely over the wording of a document. From our evening papers we have gathered a languid interest in the controversy. Six months later we pick up the paper and find that the dispute is still going on. A German and an Englishman play a game of chess over the cable. This too is reported in our journal, and we follow its progress with attention through the weeks of its duration. Somebody agitates the establishment of a new industry in our native town. It will raise the value of our real estate, so we attend meetings for some months and talk about it, after which the industry is assured. Two years later it is in operation and we congratulate ourselves. Friends of our younger days marry; and before we know it their houses are noisy with the shoutings of children. Leisurely we grow older. Our ideas become fixed, often by the most trivial of circumstances. Africa means tangled forest; India, a jungle; Siberia, broad snow plains; all South America, a dripping stillness of tropical verdure; simply because somewhere, some time, a book or paper, the woodcut of a child's lesson, has so generalized them for us.

Against these preconceived notions the events we read about are cast.

In very much this way the constant facts of the West have been to us the Indian and the buffalo. Before our eyes the Master Showman has held insistently this picture. Against the background of the occidental hills or the flat reach of the grass-nodding prairies has posed in solemn gravity the naked warrior, leaning from his pony upon his feather-bedecked lance; or, in the choking dust of its own progression, has lumbered heavily the buffalo myriad. These have seemed permanent—the man and the beast.

Then, before our protesting conservatism, the scene has dissolved in a mist of strange shapes and violent deeds, only to steady a moment later into a new picture. The mounted figure has disappeared, and in his place, against the glow of sunset, the sturdy form of the husbandman grasps the shaft of his plough, gazing past the tired horses, and brooding the slow thoughts of his calling. The last rays catch the sheen of grain—a sea of it—and shimmer lightly until they lose themselves in contrast with the square of ruddy light that marks the windows of a farmhouse.

This is the new West. We rub our eyes and wonder. The diplomats still squabble; the chess game dawdles its languid way; the factory is getting ready to pay its first dividend; our friends' children are about to enter the high school. Everything has developed along the usual lines of growth, and yet this greater change has come about in a night. We turn back the files of our paper, and find that it has occupied in the world's history just fifteen years! In that little space of time the institutions of untold ages have been overthrown and new ones substituted for them.

Deadwood was founded in 1876. In 1890 Sitting Bull and his tribe were utterly destroyed in the mid-winter fight at Wounded Knee. Between those dates, the Dakotas have manufactured at home an article of quite adequate civilization.

To be sure, the product is perhaps a little crude. Although enormous grain fields attest indubitably that the farmer has tamed the soil, equally enormous Indian reservations as indubitably dispute too sweeping an assertion of it. Electric railways may be instanced in some towns. The sprightly six-shooter is in others the quickest road to the longest journey. Hot Springs has a modern hotel and an improved bar; a scant thirty miles north is the unsheriffed log-mining camp where the " bad man " terrorizes in all his glory.

These things are true, but they count for little. The great facts remain, and they are these: a cowboy named Tenney tried to lasso the last buffalo some years since and got himself yanked over several irregular miles of country; the Sioux are herded nicely on their reservations and shoot at nickels with bows and arrows for the amusement of passing tourists. The old frontier conditions have gone. If you want trouble, you must go out to look for it; it no longer comes to you unsought. In a word the broad sea of the wilderness has shrunken to bayous and bays surrounded and intersected by dried areas fit for the cultivation of paper collars and tenderfeet. The frontier still exists, but exists in its isolation only because it is not as commercially desirable as the rest.

This is true of the country at large. It is also true of Pah-sap-pah, the Black Hills. Already a railroad has pushed its way up the main valley. The folders show a map with the usual blood-red artery of mathe-

matical straightness, passing through myriads of small-type towns, clinging desperately by their noses to the blessings of commerce, and sundry dignified, large-type cities, standing more aloof on their own merits. It all looks imposing enough on paper; but in reality the line does little more than keep itself warm in the narrow valley of its route. On closer inspection the myriads of towns disappear. Minnekahta is a station in the midst of a vast plain, Pringles a sawmill, Stony Point just nothing at all. For the Black Hills are great of extent, and one county of the Dakotas could swallow an eastern State.

All this, from border warfare to comparative order —say from Canute to Elizabeth—not in a thousand years, but in the brief age of a man-child growing out from his kindergarten into his college!

To one who has lived with the country, the process has been an education more thorough than that usually vouchsafed men. It has lacked in the graces and accomplishments, perhaps, but it has brought to the highest pitch the two qualities of self-reliance and of power of insight into men's characters. Whatever blunders a frontiersman may commit when visiting his neighbor cities in the East, they are never the bashful blunders of a countryman. Bunco men can clean him out in a gambling joint, but who ever heard of their selling him a gold brick? He has lived through all this hundreds of years ago, when Wild Bill was killed at Deadwood, or perhaps a century or so later, when, the year following, Alfred took the Caldwells to the Hills and was so nearly rushed by the Sioux. His life has been an epitome. He has met most conditions at one time or another, and is no longer afraid of them.

In a tale dealing with this period of the dissolving view—when in changing from one slide of the lantern to the other the Master Showman has permitted us a little glimpse of hurrying, heroic figures and dazzled us with the clouds of great deeds swiftly done—the teller must adopt one of two methods. He must either generalize, or be content to spend his space on single episodes. In that period, every day was a book. Men counted as nothing experiences filled with an excitement or a pathos or a beauty intense enough to render significant the whole life of a quiet New Englander. Acts were many, and trod close on one another's heels, yet to each act there was a sequence of motive, of desire, of logical effect, as well capable of being sought out and described as though they were not entangled and confused in the rush of the moments. The story teller could find his task in the dissection of these, and the task would be interesting. But to one who is concerned, not with a period, but a life, this is impossible.

The fifteen years saw a marked change in the fortunes of the half-breed known as Michaïl Lafond. During all that time he had led an apparently honest and law-abiding life. No man could say that he had been cheated by him or that he had been favored; but one and all with whom the half-breed had come into contact could speak with admiration and fear of the latter's power of seizing the best of the main chance. He had left the child at the Spotted Tail reservation, giving her name as Molly Lafond and making arrangements for her maintenance. He turned some gold claims to advantage, but abandoned that sort of thing as too uncertain. He participated mildly in the prosperity of several of the mushroom towns of the period,

but soon drew out of booms as possessing also too much of the element of luck.

He did the hundreds of other things to which men in a new country can always turn their hands, and in each he made his profit; but in each he found something lacking to the elaborate scheme of power he had builded one evening before a prairie camp fire. Finally he hit upon whisky and dance halls and there he stayed. Abandoning all other enterprises, he gave his individual attention to these two, for he found in them not only the surest and largest monetary returns, but the certain popularity which men accord to those who minister to their pleasures. From Deadwood to Edgemont there gradually grew up a string of saloons bearing the name of Lafond. Some of them were paying, some on the point of paying, some merely lying latent for the boom which Lafond thought to see in the near future. For, as of old, he delighted in discounting the future. He liked long shots in his investments.

Over each of these various establishments their owner was in the habit of placing a man chosen according to the needs of the place, and this man fell more or less under Lafond's personal supervision according as the exigencies of the case seemed to demand it. The half-breed's policy was to keep in actual touch with the most prosperous, and to give personal effort to the most promising. The others could take care of themselves until their time came. So at Mulberry Gulch, where the camp consisted only of a number of grub stakers, he owned a little log cabin which he had never seen. At Deadwood, an old and prosperous camp, he was proprietor of a begilded and bemirrored splendor so well established that it needed

only a periodical supervising visit to keep it running smoothly. At Copper Creek was also nothing but a log-cabin saloon; but Copper Creek bade fair to amount to something. Perhaps the spirit of the three kinds was best indicated by the signs over their counters. Mulberry Gulch exhibited a rudely lettered device informing the public, "Pies, Whisky and Pistols for Sail Here." Deadwood thirsty ones learned that they should "Ask for Our 1860 Old Crow; the Finest on Earth." Copper Creek sententiously remarked: "To Trust is Bust."

All this symbolized nothing more or less than the commercial history of a successful man in the West. It meant nothing except that Lafond had the instinct and the cleverness, and so was getting rich. More interesting than the change of his fortune was the change of the man himself.

In the old days he had been crafty in a subtle way; but he had been impulsive, eager, excitable, inclined to jump at the bidding of his intuitions. Now his character seemed to have expanded and modified. A powder explosion had slightly bent his straight figure, halted his gait, and seamed his face with powder marks. To hide these last, he wore a beard. The effect was one of quiet responsibility, and a certain geniality, though a keen observer might have hesitated to call this geniality kindly.

His manner was very quiet. He never reproved his subordinates or addressed a hasty word to anyone, unless he became thoroughly convinced of the culprit's incapacity. Then his anger was at white heat. He could forgive deliberate attempts to evade his commands or conscious efforts at rascality, for with them

he could cope; but mistakes he never condoned. An occasional slight inversion of the natural order of words or phrases was all that remained to him of his old accent.

Altogether he was a personage whose public position was unexceptionable. In the West no man has a past, unless that past is personified and carries a rebuking six-shooter. He had wealth, popularity, an acquaintance as wide as the Hills themselves. All that meant power, especially when combined with a shrewd ability to read men's characters.

But of the old order one thing remained—his religion. In the storm and stress of a period hot with events, his life work was conceived and laid out. The lines of its plan had been seared into his soul by crime. He no longer felt the smart, but the cicatrix was there, and he daily bowed to its symbolism, often without a thought of what it really meant. His was like the future of a boy who has entered the army; his line of conduct was all prearranged, and his independence of it never occurred to him. There was no glowering hate in this; only a certain sense of inevitability. In other words, it was his religion.

Certain things were to be done. First of all he must become wealthy. Very well; wealthy he became. He must become popular. Agreed; he cultivated his fellow men. He must know how to read character and to hit upon weaknesses. Exactly; he bent his cleverness to the task. There was a larger end to which these three were but the means; but that would come later. Just now life meant quiet, earnest compassing of the three things. Until they were quite within his grasp, he could afford to shut into the background what their

ultimate signification should be. Lafond lived tranquilly a perfectly moral existence.

But without his volition the great idea crystallized into some sort of shape. It was always in the background, to be sure; but, after all, a background fills the picture. *That which men hold to be most dear!* The years had taught him what it was, without his actually demanding it of them. Men hold most dear property, reputation, honor among their fellow men, and the love of women. Women hold most dear virtue and a good name.

About fifteen years after he had quitted the Indians, Lafond suddenly realized that he had gained the power and knew how to use it. Quite dispassionately he looked ahead to the next step.

There were Jim Buckley, Billy Knapp, Alfred and the doctor's family. The latter now included only the girl, whom Lafond had himself caused to be raised to young womanhood. Of the others, Jim Buckley and Alfred had long since left the country—Alfred for Arizona, where he had gone into cow punching; Buckley for Montana and Idaho, in whose mountains he was supposed to be prospecting. These two, then, were out of the way for the present. They would never be difficult to find, and in comparison with Billy they had held quite a secondary place at the time of the half-breed's molten state, before he had cooled into the fixed forms of his conduct of life.

The reason for this throws not a little light on Lafond's character. The feminine streak in him hated Billy Knapp personally, simply because that individual was loud in talk, great in size, and blustering in manner. He could restrain his resentment against the

bashful Alfred or the imperturbable Jim; but not that against a man who seemed always, to the high strung half-breed, the potential bully. He would have followed Billy Knapp to China, if necessary.

But it so happened that that individual, after a checkered career, had settled down in the village or camp of Copper Creek, not forty miles from Lafond's headquarters at Rapid. Billy's vicissitudes were those of many of his class. Trained in the liberal give and take policy of the early frontier times, he found himself, on their ebb, stranded high and dry without appropriate means of progression. Billy was used to relying on his plainscraft, his courage, his skill with firearms, and his personal strength. Such qualities as economy, accuracy of estimate, frugality, and patience in the overcoming of abstractions would have been, to his early life, practically useless. He came to be a big-hearted, generous fellow, without the slightest idea of the value of money or the burden of debt. He was apt to be seized by many whims, which he was wont to gratify on the spot.

"Know Billy Knapp?" ruminated an old plainsman once. "Billy Knapp? Seems to me I do; he's the feller that would buy the co't house yonder if he could get trusted for it, ain't he?"

It described him. And as in the old days his prestige had depended on individual prowess of a rather spectacular order, it came about that Billy was just a little fond of strutting. He liked to play the patron, he liked to distribute favors, to treat to drinks, to stand as the representative of great unseen forces, whether of military power in the old days, or of extensive capital in these latter.

For a great many years this vanity had remained ungratified. Billy had not the virtues to succeed in the rising commercialism of the new West. After the last great campaign against the Sioux, he found his usual occupations almost wiped from the slate. The plains were as safe as Illinois. He picked up a livelihood still, mainly by reason of his wonderful gift of persuasion, for Billy could talk black white, if only the particular shade and the discussion were situated in the West. He drove stage, broke horses, bossed cattle outfits, and finally drifted into prospecting.

There his chance came. By a lucky stroke of trading he became possessed of some really good quartz claims and a small sum of ready cash. Two weeks later he was in Chicago. It was his first trip east of the Mississippi, but he knew just what he wanted, and he got it. Three days of Billy's golden oratory led to the purchase by an Eastern syndicate of an option on his group of claims, and the understanding that toward the middle of the following summer a committee of owners should visit the property in order to discuss ways and means of developing the various quartz leads.

The delighted Billy returned to Copper Creek. There at last he found himself the important figure he had always dreamed of being. He posed to himself and to everybody else. The camp gradually filled, and the claims round about were snapped up greedily.

Lafond had easily kept himself informed of all this. It was sufficiently notorious. Now when he came to a realization that the next move in his game of life was due and that he should put to its appointed use the power he had so long amassed, he decided to study Billy Knapp in order to see which of the four—prop-

erty, reputation, honor or love—that volatile individual held most dear. He could make a shrewd guess, but he wanted to be on the ground. And as he thought about it, there came to him a great wave of enthusiasm and eagerness over this game he was about to play; a delight in the magnitude of the stakes and the power of the instruments employed, an intellectual glorying quite different and separated from his personal feelings in the matter, or that religious obligation of it which lay at the back of his soul.

XIV

INTO THE SHADOW OF THE HILLS

THE first thing Michaïl Lafond did in pursuance of his new determination was to visit the Spotted Tail reservation in order to reclaim the girl henceforth to be known as Molly Lafond.

No one knows why he had followed out his first impulse to preserve her life and bring her up. After a time, however, she came to symbolize, in his half-mystical perception of such things, the first cause of all that had happened. Personally he liked her because she was such a free, independent, fiery little creature. He liked to talk to her and be ordered about by her. He liked also to watch the graceful, decisive movements of her lithe young body and the sparkle of her hair. She looked a good deal like her mother.

He even listened with what would appear to be close sympathy to her complaints of the agent's wife and the life to be led at a reservation. She and the agent's wife never did get on well. The latter was a stern, commonplace, fat woman without sympathy. And the life! There were no men, nothing but Indians. All you could do was to read all day and all the evening, or ride straight out in any given direction that led nowhere. Michaïl Lafond, in his semi-annual visits, was inclined to agree with her and even to pity her a little. His personal likings were on the surface, and had nothing whatever to do with the deeps of his nature.

Just as the surest way of satisfying his thirst for revenge upon Billy Knapp was to deprive the man of his reputation and his property, so he had determined to make of Molly a dance-hall girl, like Colorado Jenny. It would deprive her of virtue and good name, the things a woman holds most dear. He also felt keenly, in his instinctive dramatic sense, the fitness of throwing this fine-fibred daughter of a nobler race to the hungry passions, of watching her reversion little by little to the brute type; but a formulation of it never came to the surface of his mind. And yet, I must repeat, there was in one sense nothing personal in this. Lafond felt no aversion to the girl herself. He took no pleasure in the thought of cursing her or beating her, as might a man seeking a hotter revenge. It was just cold, malignant, calculating hate of something in opposition to him, which she symbolized.

This intellectual form of hatred is a peculiar characteristic of half-breeds.

When Lafond suggested to Molly that she should leave the agency and take up her residence with him in Copper Creek, she assented very gladly, for she felt her present life insupportable. The day before, she and Mrs. Sweeney, the agent's wife, had come into violent collision.

"Where was you yesterday afternoon?" Mrs. Sweeney had asked, as Molly came into the kitchen.

It was before breakfast, so Molly shrugged an impatient shoulder.

"Riding," she replied briefly.

"Riding where?" insisted Mrs. Sweeney with heavy persistency.

"Over west."

"See anybody?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

The old lady wound her hands in her apron and fixed her charge severely with her eye.

"Strange how blind some folks is," she went on after a moment. "Now, I was indoors *washin'*, an' I see that young sergeant over there scoutin' 'round."

The words were simple; the tone was not.

"What do you mean?" cried Molly sharply. "Do you mean to say I was riding with him?"

Mrs. Sweeney wagged her head with aggravating sagacity.

"Nobody needn't put on no shoe that don't fit 'em," she said, and sighed with the air of a martyr who has discovered all and is disappointed.

Molly knew that her question had been justified by the woman's insinuation, that she had put on no shoe, and that if there were a martyr in the room it was not the agent's wife. Thereupon she said things excitedly. The agent's wife assumed an injured placidity, than which there is nothing more aggravating. Finally Molly flounced out of the room.

The agent's wife, being utterly in the wrong, sulked after the manner of women for the rest of the day, and had to be sued for forgiveness.

And yet next day, when Molly and the half-breed drove away, Mrs. Sweeney remembered that the girl had been with them nearly fifteen years, and wept; and the agent booted a trespassing Indian from his office with unwonted energy.

Molly, on the other hand, was as happy as a lark.

Every man knows the thrill of anticipation when he stows the gun case under the seat and induces the pointer to curl up in the straw, just as every woman knows the delight of an entrance to a room which her presence brightens more than any other's. Molly experienced the same thrill, the same delight. She had the instincts of the coquette; the confidence of inexperience; the false ideals of a knowledge drawn from books and speculation; and her heart had not yet awakened her conscience. She looked forward to her own power over men, for she was intelligent, and realized the extent both of her charms and of her knowledge. The latter was not inextensive, for in her reading she had enjoyed the overwhelming advantage of heredity. Heredity is a little scheme by which, to a great extent, one recognizes knowledge, instead of acquiring it.

They drove along for some distance without speaking. The girl was too happy and the half-breed too preoccupied to talk.

"Mike," she commanded suddenly after a time, "quit that smoking. I don't like it."

The half-breed hesitated, narrowing his brow, and looking straight ahead. Then he silently knocked the ashes from his pipe and slipped it into his pocket. Molly's eyes flashed with triumphant amusement. The game had begun. After a time the sun sank into the dark hills, and the great shadow of Harney crept out of them.

The wagon rattled down a short incline to the broad, shallow bed of the Cheyenne. Molly turned it aside into a little grass plat.

"We'll camp here to-night," she announced.

" There is better water two mile further, on the trail, on Fall River," said Lafond, without moving.

" I said we'd camp here ! " repeated the girl sharply.

The half-breed descended and began to unharness the horses.

XV

IN WHICH CHEYENNE HARRY LOSES HIS PISTOL

THE camp which was to be the scene of Lafond's operations and of the girl's anticipated triumphs, lay between Ragged Top and Tom Custer. It consisted of a double row of log cabins situated in the V of the deep ravine. The men generally ate in the long dining-room of the hotel, worked at prospecting in the hills, and spent their evenings in the centrally situated Little Nugget saloon, the property of Michaïl Lafond.

The night of the half-breed's arrival the usual crowd was carrying on the usual discussions on the usual subjects.

One fresh from the East entering the building would have been struck first with the strangeness of the room. It was long and low, and on three sides dark. Against the fourth wall was stretched tightly a white cotton sheet, imitating plaster, in front of which stood the bar. The bar was polished, narrow, with a foot rest in front and two towels hanging from metal clasps just under the projecting eaves of it. It had been brought in sections, by wagon, at considerable expense. Some three feet behind the bar, stretched a shelf of the same height, towel covered, on which stood four bottles in front of a little mirror. The shelf was piled symmetrically with glasses of all shapes—tumblers, ponies, fine-stemmed wineglasses—arranged in pyramids and squares. They

glittered in the glare of the lamps, and the indirect light from the white sheet. A dim pink reflection was given back by the mirror—dim and pink because the glass was draped with pink mosquito bar. Overhead hung the sign which read, "To Trust is Bust."

Beneath the reflector of the largest lamp lounged the barkeeper reading a paper. He had spread the paper on the bar, and, having crooked his elbows out at wide angles around its margin, was bending his head of straw-colored hair close over the print. He was dressed in white as to the upper part of his body. Occasionally he read aloud in a monotone from the paper. At other times his lips moved slowly, shaping the invisible words as they took form in his sluggish brain.

"The latest creations in ties," he read, "are described by our buyer as being natty effects in the narrow plaids."

Outside this glare of light from the white-dressed man, and the glittering pyramids and squares and glasses, and the dim pink reflections, and the white sheet imitating plaster, the rest of the room seemed dark by contrast. Near the door and the small front window, glowed a red-hot stove. Along the walls were ranged chairs. In the chairs sat many men smoking. Above the men a few cheap pictures were tacked against the rough walls. One of them represented an abnormally slim and smooth race horse against a background of vivid green. Another showed an equally green landscape, throwing into relief a group of red-coated men on spider-legged horses, pursuing a huddle of posing white hounds. One of the spider-legged horses had fallen, and the rider, being projected horizontally forward, was suspended rigidly in mid air,

like Mohammed's coffin, and with as much apparent prospect of coming to earth. Still another presented the sight of an exceedingly naked woman descending from an exceedingly flat and marble couch. One foot was on the floor, and the other knee rested still on the flat and marble couch. It was labelled "Surprised."

Three large lamps with reflectors illuminated this part of the room. Then came a strip of comparative dusk; then another hanging-lamp disclosed a smooth-topped table, on which was a faro lay-out.

The men in the chairs smoked industriously and spoke seldom. The air was thick with the smoke of strong tobacco, such as "Hand Made" and "Lucky Strike." Very near the stove sprawled old Mizzou, low-foreheaded, white-bearded, talking always of women and the merits of grass-widows and school-ma'ams.

"They is nothin' like 'em!" he asserted with ever-fresh emphasis of tone. "Back in Chillicothe, whar th' hogs *an'* gals is co'n-fed, they is shore bustin'! When one of them critters comes 'round, I feels jest like raisin' hell and puttin' a chunk under it!"

"Th' *hell* you do!" snorted Cheyenne Harry, scowling his handsome brows, "th' *hell* you do! Give us a rest with yore everlasting females." He pulled his hat over his eyes, and drew savagely on his pipe, his right hand over the bowl, his left clasped tight under his armpit.

Billy Knapp was telling about his mine.

"On that thar Buffalo lode," he said impressively. "I got a lead twenty foot wide. *Twenty foot*, I say! And it holds out; it holds out a lot. It's great. I says to them Chicago sharps, I says, 'You won't find

sech a lead as thet thar nowhere else in the Hills,' and by gravy I believe that's right! I do for shore! An' I says to them, I says, ' It only takes a little sinkin', an' a little five stamp mill, t' put her on a paying basis to wunst. Ain't no manner of *doubt* of it! I tell you it's a chance! that's what it is!' "

He breathed hard with the enthusiasm into which his words lifted him. He vociferated, telling over and over about his twenty foot lead. He held his great hand suspended in the air through whole sentences, bringing it down with a mighty slap as he came to his conclusions. The men about him listened unmoved. They believed what he said, but they had got over being excited at it. Jack Graham, his hat on his knees, twisted his little moustache and smiled amusedly. As the scout appealed to him from time to time, he nodded silent assent. Over beyond the bar of dusk, two men were staking small sums at faro. The keen-eyed dealer was monotonously calling the cards. " All ready; all down; hands up; jack win; queen lose! " he drawled.

In the corner nearest the door, a youth of eighteen huddled on the floor asleep. Here and there wandered an active wire-haired dog, bigger than a fox terrier and of different color, but with the terrier's bright eyes and alert movements. It was a strange beast, brown and black on the head, black on the body, badger gray on the legs, with sharp white teeth, over which bristled gray whiskers of the stiffness of a hair brush. As it passed the various men, it eyed them closely, ready to wag its stump of a tail in friendship, or to circle warily in avoidance of a kick. It was a self-reliant dog, a dog used to taking care of itself. Men called it Peter, without abbreviation.

Peter was possessed of the spirit of restlessness. He smelled everything, first with dainty sniffs, then with long, deep inhalations. Thus he came to know the inner nature of table legs and chairs, of men's boots and of dark corners. Between investigations he would stand in front of the bar and stretch, sticking first one hind leg, then the other, at stiff angles behind him, and then, fore feet far in front, pressing the chest of his long body nearly to the floor.

These things irritated Cheyenne Harry. He attempted to command Peter harshly, but Peter paid no attention.

"Off his feed," observed Dave Williams to young Barker in an undertone.

"Yeah," agreed the latter.

About eight o'clock Blair and the stage drew in and drew out again, after warming at the red-hot stove a little cross man who cursed the whole West—climate, scenery, and all—with a depth and heartiness that left these loyal Westerners gasping. Billy Knapp had attempted to reply, but had not held his own in the interchange.

After the stranger had gone out, the pristine calm broke into a froth of recrimination. The room shouted. It blamed Billy. It cursed the stranger. It thought of a dozen things that might have been said or done, as is the fashion of rooms. Billy vociferated against the tourist.

"Little two by four prospec' hole!" he cried. "He may be all right whar he comes from, which don't rank high anyhow, but when he comes out yar makin' any sech fool breaks as that, he don't assay a cent a ton fo' sense!"

"Oh, hell," growled Cheyenne Harry. "You-all make me tired!"

"Shake yore grouch, Harry," they advised good-humoredly. Cheyenne Harry was popular, fearless and a good shot. He had a little the reputation, in some quarters, of being a "bad man."

Billy went on with his tirade. The men shook their heads. "You wasn't ace high, Billy," said they. Billy insisted, getting more and more excited. They looked down from the calm of superior wisdom. Their anger vanished in Billy's. He was angry for the whole crowd.

"Moroney ought to have been here," they observed regretfully. "He's th' boy! He'd have trimmed th' little cuss good. Can't get ahead of Moroney nohow."

Billy denied that Moroney could have done better than he, Billy, did. The men championed Moroney's cause with warmth. A new discussion arose out of the old. With a prodigious clatter every man drew up his chair until a circle was formed. Archibald Mudge, alias Frosty, the barkeeper, leaned his head on his fists across the bar, trying to hear. The two men at the faro game cashed in and quit. The faro dealer, imperturbable, indifferent, cat-like, shuffled his cards. Around the outside of the word-hurling circle Peter wandered, sniffing at chairs and the boots of men.

Then on a sudden Molly and the half-breed arrived, to the vast astonishment of Copper Creek, which had no women and expected none.

The newcomers appeared in the doorway, apparently from nowhere, pausing a moment before entering the saloon. Molly leaned a hand on each jamb, and calmly surveyed the room. Lafond blinked his

eyes at the light, imperturbably awaiting the girl's good pleasure. After a moment she stepped inside, and again looked the apartment over, slowly, searchingly. She saw in that long sweeping glance everything there was to be seen—the men and their various attitudes, the bar, the glasses, the mirror draped with mosquito bar, the white cotton sheet, the lamps, the faro table, even the three sporting pictures on the wall.

In that moment she made up her mind what to do. Her heart was beating fast and her color was high. She experienced all the sensations of a man going into battle, but not a timid man, or one not sure. Rather, she felt a new access of force, a new confidence, a new imperious power that would bend conditions to suit itself. She knew in a flash just how to tame these untamed men.

Then she stepped swiftly forward and marched up to the bar, against which she leaned the broad of her back, running her arms along the rail on either side and resting one heel against the foot rest. She tossed her curls back, and again looked coolly at the silent men.

An observer might have found it interesting to note how the different inmates of the room took this unexpected appearance of the First Woman. Billy Knapp stared with round, gloating eyes, in which a hundred possibilities awoke. Cheyenne Harry, aroused from his slouching attitude, thrust his pipe into his pocket and furtively smoothed his moustache. Graham looked the newcomer over with cool inquiring scrutiny. Frosty began to polish a glass, finding relief from his embarrassment in accustomed and commonplace occupation. The faro dealer shuffled his

cards, imperturbable, indifferent, cat-like. Peter sat upright on his haunches, sniffing daintily, first in the girl's direction, then in the man's, watching, bright-eyed and alert. Peter was the only being in the place who noticed the girl's companion. The latter, in turn, inspected the room deliberately, with a crafty calculation.

"Well," said Molly Lafond, with slow scorn, "how long are you going to sit there before you take care of a lady's horses?"

Then they suddenly became aware of the half-breed and of the white-covered schooner, dimly visible through the door. They began to regain control of their wits. The arrested currents of life moved once more. Who was this girl? Why should she command? Above all, why did not this little black hairy man take care of his own horses? Men helped themselves in the West.

They stirred uneasily, but no one responded. The girl's eyes flashed.

"Move!" she commanded, stretching her arm with a sudden and regal gesture toward the door.

The three men nearest jumped up and hurried out. The girl stood for an instant, her arm still outstretched; then she dropped it to her side with a rippling laugh.

"You boys need someone to make you stand 'round, that's all," she said. "Next time I speak, you *rustle!*"

She placed her hands behind her on the bar, and jumped lightly upward, perching on one corner and swinging her little feet to and fro. She sat in the focus of one of the larger lamps, seeming to radiate with a strange hard brilliancy. Her eyes sparkled and her curly golden hair escaped from under her old peaked

cap in a bewildering tangle of twisted and glittering fire. She went on easily, without embarrassment, chattering in so assured a manner that the men were silenced by the very shyness that should have been hers.

"We got here a little late, boys," she said, conversationally, "on account of a hot box, but here we are—me and Mike. You don't know us though, do you? Well, this is Mike Lafond." She looked toward the half-breed, and a sudden inspiration lit her eye. "Black Mike!" she cried, clapping her hands. "That's it; Black Mike." She paused in happy contemplation of the appropriateness of this nickname. It seemed to fit; and it stuck forever after. "He owns this joint here, he says, and I reckon he says right," she went on after a pause. "He ain't pretty, but I'll tend to that for the family." She perked her head sideways, proving the point beyond contest.

Peter, who had been watching her, his own head in the same attentive pose, took this as a signal. He barked sharply. "Shut up, dog!" commanded Molly. She seized a pretzel from a tin pan at her side and threw it at Peter. Peter considered the pretzel as a contribution, so subsided.

"Well, boys, I'm glad to be here. I'm going to stay. You might look more pleased." She cast her eye along the group of men, each in a tense attitude of uneasiness. Graham's nonchalant and lounging self-poise struck her. "Aren't you glad?" she asked, pointing her finger at him. His quizzical smile only deepened. Failing to confuse him, as she intended, Molly hastily abandoned him. "You ought to be," she asserted, skilfully turning the remark in the direction of Cheyenne Harry. "Come here and let's look

at you. I want to know your name. You ain't bashful, are you?"

Harry put on an appearance of ease and sauntered over to the bar. He would show the boys that he was used to society. He grinned at her pleasantly.

"Can't no one look purty nex' to you!" he said boldly.

"Well, well!" cried Molly, clapping him lightly on the shoulder. "That's the first pleasant word I've had, and after I've told you I was coming here to live, too!"

Billy Knapp bounced up, eager to retrieve his reputation.

"Th' camp bids you welcome, ma'am, an' is proud and pleased that such a beauteous member of her lovely sect is come amongst us!" he orated.

The men moved their chairs slightly. One or two cleared their throats. The constraint was beginning to break.

"Thank you," replied Molly prettily. "This is an occasion. Mike here asks you all to have a drink. Don't you, Mike?"

The half-breed nodded. He was watching the progress of affairs keenly.

Frosty set out glasses, into which the men poured whiskey from small black bottles. Harry gave his own to the girl, and then procured another for himself. Mike sat by the stove. Peter approached tentatively, but decided to remain at a wary distance. At the other end of the room the faro dealer shuffled his cards, indifferent, imperturbable, cat-like; a strange man, without friends, implacable and just. The men who had gone to stable the horses entered and received their glasses. The girl raised hers high in the air.

" Now," she cried, " here's hoping we'll all be good friends ! "

The men drank their whiskey. They were slowly developing a certain enthusiasm over the new girl. Constraint was gone. They lounged easily against the bar. Two stood out near the middle of the floor, where they could see better, their arms across each other's shoulders. Molly touched her lips to her glass, and handed it to Billy, who stood on the other side of her. " Drink it for me," she whispered confidentially in his ear.

" It'll make me drunk," he said in mock objection. She looked incredulous. " You have touched it with yore lips," he explained sentimentally, and drank to cover his confusion. He felt elated. He had made a pretty speech, too.

The girl laughed and put her hand caressingly on his shoulder. At either knee was one of these great men; about were many others, all looking at her with admiration, waiting for her words. This was triumph ! This was power ! And then she looked up and found Graham's calm gray eyes fixed on her in quizzical amusement. She turned away impatiently and began to talk.

Never was such airy persiflage heard in a mining camp before. The prospectors were dissolved in a continual grin, exploded in a perpetual guffaw. Now they understood the charm of woman's conversation, which Moroney had so often extolled. They spared a thought to wish that Moroney were here to take part in this. " Moroney can do such elegant horsing," they said. What a pair this would be ! How she glanced from one member to the other of the group with her

witty speeches! She rapped each man's knuckles hard, to the delight of all the rest, and yet the fillip left no pain, but only a pleasant glow. They laughed consumedly.

And then, after a little, she asked them if they could sing; and without waiting for a reply, she struck up a song of her own in a high, sweet voice. With a gripping of the heart and a catching of the breath, they recognized the air. Not one man there had ever heard its words in a woman's voice before. It was "Sandy Land," the universal, the endless, the beloved, the song that brings back to every Westerner visions of other times when he has sung it, and other places—the night herd, the camp fire, the trail. With the chorus there came a roar as every man present sang out the heart that was in him. The girl was surrounded in an instant. This was the moment of which she had dreamed. She half closed her eyes, and laughed with the gurgling over-note of a triumphant child.

Cheyenne Harry straightened from his lounging position at the girl's left, slipped his arm about her waist, and kissed her full upon the lips.

The room suddenly became very still. Peter could be heard scratching his neck with stiffened hind leg behind the stove. Graham half started from his seat, but sank back as he saw the girl's face. Mike never stirred or missed a puff on his short pipe.

The girl paled a little, and, putting her hands behind her, slid carefully off the edge of the bar to the floor. Then she walked with quick firm steps to the offender and slapped him vigorously, first on one side of the head, then on the other. He raised his elbows to defend his ears, whereupon she reached swiftly for-

ward under his arm and slipped his pistol from its open holster; after which she retreated slowly backward, holding both hands behind her. Cheyenne Harry turned red and white, and looked about him helplessly.

"You ain't big enough to have a gun!" she said, with scorn. "When you get man enough to tell me you're sorry, I'll give it back."

She crossed the room toward the street, dangling the pistol on one finger by the trigger guard.

"I reckon I'll go now," she said simply. She passed through the door to the canvas-covered schooner outside.

A breathless but momentary silence was broken by Cheyenne Harry.

"I know it, boys, I know it," he protested. "Don't say a word. Frosty, trot out the nose paint."

Billy was fuming.

"*Hell* of a way to do!" he muttered. "Nice *hospitable* way to welkim a lady! *Lovely* idee she gets of this camp!"

Harry turned on him slowly. "What's it to yuh?" he asked malevolently. "What's it to yuh, eh? I want to know! Who let *you* in this, anyway?"

He thrust his head forward at Billy.

"For the love of Peter the Hermit, shut up, you fellows!" cried Jack Graham. "Don't make everlasting fools of yourselves. That girl can take care of herself without any of your help, Billy; and it served you dead right, Harry, and you know it."

"That's right, Billy," said several.

Harry growled sulkily in his glass. "Ain't I knowin' it?" he objected. "Ain't I payin' fer this drink

because I know it? But I ain't goin' t' have any ranikaboo ijit like Billy Knapp rubbin' it in."

"Billy didn't mean to rub it in," said Jack Graham, "so shake hands and let up."

The threatened quarrel was averted, and the men drank on Harry. Then Mike set up the drinks to the furtherance of their friendly relations. They talked to Mike at length, inquiring his plans, approving his sense in choosing Copper Creek as a residence, congratulating him on his daughter, commending her style. Mike hoped they would make the Little Nugget their evening headquarters. They replied with enthusiasm that they would. Mike made himself agreeable in a quiet way, without saying much. Everybody was "stuck" on him—everybody but Harry. Harry sulked over Billy's insults. His sullen mood had returned. Finally, late in the evening, he pushed his chair back abruptly and went up to the bar.

"I'm goin'," he announced. "Give me that bottle."

He poured himself a stiff drink, which he absorbed at a toss of the wrist, and turned away.

"Mr. Mortimer," called Frosty, "did you pay for this?"

"Chalk it down to me," called Harry, without looking back.

Frosty caught the snake eye of his proprietor fixed upon him. He twisted his feet in terror beneath the bar. "It's agin the rules," he called at last, weakly, just as Harry reached the door.

The latter turned in heavy surprise. Then he walked deliberately back to the bar, on which he leaned his elbows.

"Look yere," he said truculently, "ain't I good fer that?"

"Why, yes, I reckon so," cried poor Frosty in an agony. "But it's agin the rules."

"Rules, rules!" sneered Harry. "Since when air you runnin' this joint on rules? Ain't you chalked drinks up to me before? Ain't you? Answer me that. Ain't you?"

"But it's different now," objected Mudge.

"Different, is it? Well, you chalk that drink up to me as I tell yuh, or go plumb to th' devil for the pay. And don't you bother me no more, or I'll have to be harsh to yuh!" Harry loved to bully, and he was working off his irritation. The men in the room stood silent. Harry liked an audience. He went on: "I'll shoot up yore old rat joint yere till you ain't got glass enough left to mend your wall eye, you white-headed little varmint."

Lafond had come softly to the end of the bar. "Naw," he interrupted quietly, "you are not shooting up anything."

Harry turned slowly to him and spread his legs apart. "And did you address me, sir?" he begged with mock politeness. "Would you be so p'lite as to repeat yore remarks?"

"You are not shooting up anything," reiterated Mike, "and it is you who will settle for this drink. Behold the sign which you have read!"

Harry turned to the room wide eyed. "Did you hear the nerve of it?" he inquired. "Tellin' me what I'll do! You damn little greaser," he cried in sudden fury, "I'll show you whether I'm shootin' up anythin'!"

He reached for his gun, remembered on the instant that his holster was empty, and sprang for Lafond.

The half-breed calmly lifted a whiskey glass, near which he had taken the precaution to stand, and slopped its contents full in the other's eyes. Harry, blinded, struck against the corner of the bar. Mike slipped to one side and produced his revolver.

Several sprang between the two men. The room was in an uproar. Peter barked, clamant, frantic. Everybody tried to talk at once. In the background the faro dealer ceased shuffling his cards, and began imperturbably, indifferently, to pack together his lay-out. He had made little that night. After a moment he went out, without a glance toward the excited group.

The men were forcing the blinded and raving Harry toward the door. Mike leaned over the bar, watching with bright eyes, his arms folded across his chest and the pistol barrel peeping over the crook of one elbow.

When they had all gone out, most of them shouting good-natured farewells, he turned savagely on the pale-faced Mudge. The native cruelty of the man blazed forth. He scored the barkeeper with a tongue that lashed like a whip, vituperating, crushing with the weight of his sarcasm, frightening with the vividness of his threats. Mudge shrank back into the corner of the space behind the bar, spreading his arms along either side, watching the half-breed with wide-open fascinated eyes, as one would watch a dangerous wild beast.

After a little the storm passed. Lafond asked in surly tones where the bunk was. Frosty showed him his own, behind the saloon, in a little shack of hewn timbers. Without a word Lafond turned in, dressed as he was, and closed his eyes. For a time he ruminated slowly. He had seen his man, and already he

could put his finger on one weak point in Billy's personality—love of the spectacular, of bombast. A blow to his vanity would hurt. The half-breed had also taken fair measure of most of the other men in the room. He knew how to ingratiate himself, and his bold move in the case of Cheyenne Harry had had that object directly in view. He did not as yet see clearly just what form his blow to Billy's vanity was to take, but that would come with time. Lafond's calling and his position in the new town gave him unlimited opportunities for observation, and he was in no hurry. After waiting fifteen years, another twelvemonth would not matter.

"Go slow," said Black Mike to himself.

His doze was abruptly broken by Frosty's scared voice asking a question. The barkeeper's thick wits could not take in the situation. He was frightened almost out of his senses, and incapable of consecutive thought.

"And where shall I sleep, sir?" he asked stupidly in a timid little voice.

Mike turned over explosively. "You can sleep in hell for all of me!" he shouted angrily. "Get out!"

Frosty returned to the main room of the saloon. There he spread a horse blanket, redolent of the stables, on the floor behind the stove. After a time Peter lay down beside him. The barkeeper, frightened, stupid, vaguely nervous, in his slow nerveless way, gathered the strange intelligent dog to him, and the two slept.

The men took Harry to the creek, where he washed out his eyes. They had many comments to make, to none of which Harry vouchsafed a reply. But his

sulkiness was gone. Suddenly he paused for a moment in his ablutions, and laughed.

"Damned if they ain't a pair!" he asserted. "And that gal——"

"She shore beats grass-widders and school-ma'ams!" said Old Mizzou.

XVI

AND GETS IT BACK AGAIN

THE girl had seen all that Lafond had seen and more. She knew now that Billy Knapp was easily the most important figure in the camp; that Cheyenne Harry was the most admired and feared; that Jack Graham was the most likely to be heard from in the future. The other men fell into the background behind these three figures. The situation was simplified by the fact. All she needed now for complete triumph was, to discover the vulnerable points of these three, attack them craftily, and the game was hers.

She thought she knew the way. She fell asleep dreaming of it. She awoke in the early morning with the day's plan clear and perfect in her mind, each move in the game she was to play clearly outlined before her. It had come to her in the night without conscious effort on her own part.

She dressed herself in the semi-obscurity of the wagon-body, and stepped out into the morning. The brook was not far away. She discovered it, and bathed her face and throat in its ice-cold waters. Then she returned to the wagon, where she made breakfast of a huge irregular chunk of bread and slices of cold bacon, sitting on the wagon tongue and swinging her feet carelessly back and forth while eating. Occasionally she threw a remnant to the few silent Canada jays that drifted here and there in the sleeping town, fluffed out

like milkweed pollen in the summer, searching for scraps. They swooped to her offerings on swift motionless wing, and then retreated to a distance, whence they abused their benefactor with strident voice. The girl watched them idly.

How to impress her personality in the most agreeable way on the greatest number of men! The problem was many faceted. She must not show favoritism; therefore the method must be general. She must render herself and not merely her sex agreeable: therefore it would have to be personal. It must appeal to the men's sense of protection rather than to their mere admiration; therefore in it she must efface herself, and exalt them. This was all apparently contradictory. But no; she saw it clearly in a flash. She must let them do her a favor. Instinctively she realized, though she did not formulate the thought, that this is one of the sure ways of gaining a man's good will. She cast back over the necessities of the case, and saw that it would suffice. In doing something for her, they would at once stand well in their own eyes, because of a certain consciousness of unselfish effort; they would expand protectively toward her, because of her weakness, implied in the fact that they could do her a kindness. What was the favor to be? The wagon behind her answered the question. They should build her a house.

All this passed through her mind, as a drift setting in from upstream, gliding before her consciousness, and floating on down stream in unhasting progression. She did not realize that she was thinking out a problem; at least she made no effort to do so. It came to her as she needed it. To all appearance she was watch-

ing idly, with unruffled brow, the tenuous threads of smoke which indicated that the camp was awakening. The number of these smoke signals suggested a new problem. She could hardly enlist the entire population of a camp the size of Copper Creek in the task of building one little log cabin. The idea of the swarming multitude struck her as so funny that she laughed aloud. She must choose; and the choice must be judicious. The men selected must represent the influential element, the leaders of opinion; while those denied the privilege of serving her must be the sort who always follow with the majority. Here her intuition balked, and her scanty knowledge could not help it out. She was frankly puzzled.

As she sat there knitting her brows, a boy came up the street. He was bare-foot, straw-hatted, freckled. He had wide gray eyes, a snub nose, and an impudent mouth. His clothes were varied and inadequate. Over his arm he carried a little rifle. About him, at a wary distance, frisked Peter, escaped from the Little Nugget through some mysterious back exit.

The boy occasionally threw an impatient stick at Peter, whereupon Peter would suddenly place two paws in front of him and bend his back down, with every appearance of delight. Then the boy would issue commands to Peter anent returning home, to which Peter paid not the slightest attention. So absorbed was he in his effort to get rid of what he evidently considered an undesirable companion, that he did not notice the girl until he was within a few yards of her. He then gave his entire attention to her inspection. He stood on one spot and stared without winking, digging a big toe into the dust. His unabashed eyes took

in every detail. He was without embarrassment, and evidently gave not a thought to the effect of this extended scrutiny on the object of it.

"Hello, kid!" called Molly.

The boy completed his leisurely inspection. Then, "Hello," he answered, with reserve.

"Won't you come over and see me?"

He weighed the point and drew nearer.

"Who are you?" he asked bluntly.

"My name's Molly; what's yours?"

"Dennis Moroney. They call me the Kid. Whatchew doin' here?"

"I'm going to live here."

"Oh," said he, and looked her all over again. "This rifle's a flobert," he observed.

"Is it? Let's see. What do you shoot with it? Is there much game up here?"

"Don't snap it; it's bad for it. They's lots of game. I got a fox squirrel the other day. He was so long. He was up a big pine, and I hit him right through the head."

"You must be a good shot. Will you take me hunting with you some day?"

"I dunno," he replied doubtfully. "Girls ain't much good."

"Try me," urged Molly, smiling.

"I'll let you shoot her off anyway," he said magnanimously. "But you gotter help clean her. If you don't clean her, she gets rusty and won't shoot straight. Here's the catridges."

"What little bits of things! Will they kill anything?"

"Hoh!" replied the Kid with contempt.

"Is that your dog?" hastily inquired Molly, conscious of her error. Peter was busily engaged in acquiring an olfactory knowledge of the four wheels and two axles of the wagon.

"Him? Naw. He's the bigges' fool dog I ever see. He goes along unless you tie him up. And he keeps rummagin' around, and he scares all the game there is. *I* can't *make* him stay home."

A cabin door opened quickly, and a miner issued forth.

"There goes Dan Barker," said the Kid.

In twenty minutes Molly knew the history of everyone of any importance in town. She found the child's primitive instinct of hero worship an unerring touchstone by which to judge of each individual's influence in this little community. He reflected the camp's opinion, and this was exactly what she wanted to learn. She encouraged the boy to talk—not a difficult matter, for his attentions had hitherto been quite ignored, saving by Frosty and Peter. Frosty had proved valuable always in the matter of skinning game or extracting refractory shells, but he had never, even in his youngest days, been a boy. Between Peter and the Kid was waged a perpetual war on the subject of hunting methods. The Kid believed in stalking. Peter held the opinion that the chase was the only noble form of the sport. The child had been lonely, strange. Now he chatted to Molly with all the self-reliant confidence which pertains of right to healthy boyhood, but which heretofore he had been denied. He boasted with accustomed air. He spoke lightly of great deeds. Molly did not laugh at him. His heart warmed to her, and he fell in love with her on the spot. This was

perhaps the most important conquest the girl was destined to make, for there is no devotion in the world like that of a boy of thirteen for a girl older than himself.

In a little time, Molly had gathered a number of men about her, and was holding them by sheer force of charm.

"How are you?" she called pleasantly to the first.

"Purty smart," grinned the man, slouching past awkwardly. "How's yourself?"

"Good. Come on over and see me and the Kid for awhile."

She talked to him lightly, while he lumbered along after with his slow wits. Other men came out, to all of whom she called a greeting, and some of whom she summoned to her. She held them easily. It became an audience, a court. They had a good time. There was much laughter. No one grudged the delay. Each man held his axe shouldered, expecting to go on to work in a moment or so, but still lingering—because she willed that he should.

After a time, the hotel began to give up its inmates. The gambler came forth into the sunshine and lit a cigarette. Graham joined him, casting an amused eye at the men about the wagon. Two or three others, including the proprietor, leaned against the hitching rail watching the animated group. Finally Cheyenne Harry sauntered carelessly forth. His broad hat—straight-brimmed in a lop-brimmed camp—was pushed to one side. He swaggered a little.

The girl saw him and jumped down from the wagon tongue, breaking off suddenly in a remark she was making.

"Hi, you!" she called.

He paid no attention.

"Hi, you!" she repeated, jumping up and down with a pretty impatient flutter of the hands. "Hi, you! Come here! You're wanted!"

He looked up surprised.

"Come here!" she repeated.

And he went.

"Now, boys," she said, when he had joined the group, "I'm going to live with you, and if I live with you, I must have a place to live in. So I want you to build me a shack. Will you do it?"

The men looked at one another.

"All right," went on Molly, taking their silence for consent, and assuming a small air of proprietorship which became her well. She specified site and size. "And you," she commanded Cheyenne Harry, "are to boss one gang and I'll take the other. You stay here and level up, and I'll go with some of the boys to cut the timber."

She knew Harry would not refuse because his pistol holster was empty and all the camp knew why. And yet levelling up is a most disagreeable job, for it is a question of pulverized rock and wood blocks, in soft ground; and of blasting with dynamite, in hard ground.

Molly issued her orders rapidly. Axes were found, log chains exhumed from the warehouse dust, horses harnessed. She waited long enough to see the gang under Cheyenne Harry well started in its work; and then, herself mounted on one of the horses, she and the other men took their way down the ravine in search of timber. She was satisfied with having been able to

give Cheyenne Harry just the position of authority in the little undertaking which he now held, but she confessed to a feeling of disappointment that Billy Knapp had not been forthcoming, for he too should have had a place in her scheme. She had observed Jack Graham near the hotel, but she had other ideas in regard to the management of that refractory individual.

But it so happened that, in regard to Billy, chance helped her out. The route selected ran up the valley, and about the bend was situated the Great Snake lode, Billy Knapp's famous claim, before the shack of which its proprietor was at that very moment fuming savagely over the non-arrival of certain men he had hired to build more fitting quarters for the new company's inspection. Billy blew a big cloud from his pipe, and swore, when he finally caught sight of a group of axemen and horses headed in his direction.

The men saw him too. They began to laugh. "Good one on Billy Knapp," they agreed. "He must be pretty hot when his axe gang don't come any."

The girl overheard them.

"What's that about Billy Knapp?" she asked sharply.

"Didn't mean y' to hear, ma'am," replied the speaker. "Don' matter ez fur's we's concerned. But Billy, he aims to put up a shack to-day, gettin' ready for them tenderfeet that's comin' from Cheecawgo to look over th' property; an' he hires a lot of th' boys t' put it up fer him, an', you see, you runs off with 'most the hull outfit yere to build you a shack. So, natural, we thinks it makes Billy hot."

"I see," said Molly. She reflected a moment. "Where is it?" she asked.

"That's it, right to the lef'. And that's Billy walkin' 'round loose." They laughed again.

Without a word she turned the animal she was riding sharp to the left, and began to mount the little knoll. The men followed in consternation. Billy's patience was not noted for its evenness.

"Hullo, Billy!" she cried when she was near enough. "Good morning!"

Billy had not at first caught sight of her, and was now plainly a little nonplussed over his unexpected guest. Clearly he could not at this moment "cuss out" the delinquents as they deserved. He removed his broad black hat.

"Good mo'ning! Good mo'ning!" he replied to the girl's greeting. "Come up t' see th' wo'ks?"

"Whoa!" called Molly. The men stopped. "No," she said flatly, "I didn't. Not to-day, that is. I'm busy. I'm hunting for good timber."

Billy looked puzzled. "Timber?" he repeated.

"Yes, timber. I'm going to have a shack built, and these boys are going to put it up for me."

Thus she broke the news gently. Billy looked the men over one by one. He turned a slow red.

"Huh!" he observed at last. "I thought they was goin' to wo'k fo' *me!*"

"Did you?" asked Molly sweetly. "Well, they're not; at least, not now."

That was categorical. Billy's wits did not respond to this sort of emergency very quickly. He did not want to be rude; he did not care to lose his men. Molly looked down.

"Come here and tie my shoestring," she commanded, holding out her foot, and gripping the harness with both hands.

Billy did not remember that he had ever seen so small a foot. He looked, fascinated.

"Well!" she said impatiently.

He raised his head and gazed plump into the imperious depths of a pair of blue eyes. His anger melted. He approached and attempted to tie the shoe.

None but Molly ever knew how hard that horse was kicked by the other little shoe. Indeed, no one knew at all how it happened. Some of the eye-witnesses theorized concerning bumblebees. Others said horseflies. As to the main facts, there was no doubt—that he, the horse, gave a sudden startled plunge; that she, the girl, screamed slightly and started to fall; that he, Billy Knapp, caught her full in his arms, held her the fraction of a second, and set her lightly back on the again motionless animal.

Molly caught her breath and steadied herself on Billy's shoulder. Three men officiously held the horse's head.

"My!" she gasped. "I'd like to be as strong as that!"

Billy whirled on the axe gang with a great bluster.

"Yere, you fellers!" he shouted. "What 're y' standin' around yere for? Take them hosses up in th' brush behind my shack, an' cut th' lady some timber!"

"Go ahead, boys," said Molly. She slid down from the horse. "I'll be 'long in a minute. I'm a little scairt."

They clambered on up the hill, grinning. A clank of chains told when they had stopped. A moment later the ring of axes was heard. The Kid and the rifle had disappeared in the direction of Peter's rapid and

scrambling exit. The boy and the dog hated each other apparently, and yet they could not bear to be long apart.

The girl sat down on the ground and made Billy talk about himself, which was the obvious thing to do. Billy was one of those expansive sanguine individuals without much ability in what we call practical affairs, and yet with a certain dexterity in gathering unto himself the means with which to be impractical. Because of this, he had a good opinion of himself, which at the same time he was much given to doubting. Molly induced him to flatter himself, and then deftly agreed with him.

After a time they went up through the pines to where the workmen were felling trees. Toward noon the whole party returned to town, dragging behind the horses a number of tree trunks chained together with steel chains. These were slid to the site of the house, and left in the road.

The men in camp had nearly finished their job of levelling up. Cheyenne Harry had worked hard with his own hands. In the shade of the Little Nugget, Black Mike and Graham sat, chair tilted, contemplatively watching the process. Through the open door could be perceived a gleam of white that indicated Frosty; otherwise the street of the town was empty. The prospectors were all out in the hills, preparing a suitable showing for the inspection of the boom which they felt sure must be close at hand.

The united forces rolled the foundation timbers in place, straining, sweating, grunting, for it was no easy work. The sun stood straight overhead. After a little, observing this, Molly called a halt for the noon

hour. To each man she addressed a word of thanks, and a reminder that the job was but half over. The reminder however was unnecessary, for, under the stimulus of concerted effort, public sentiment had crystallized into the opinion that the housing of a "first woman" was a public duty.

In a few moments the street was deserted, save for Cheyenne Harry and the two men under the eaves of the Little Nugget. From the chimneys of some of the cabins the smoke of cooking arose.

Cheyenne Harry, volatile, changeable, fickle, stood still in the middle of the dusty road and cursed himself for a fool. He had blistered his hands, overheated himself most uncomfortably, and made his muscles ache with unwonted lifting. For what? For a girl who, the evening before, had boxed his ears and stolen his gun. Fascinated by a pair of pretty eyes and a petty display of courage, he had worked himself like a horse. He dropped his head in a brown study, moodily digging away at the ground with his heel, ruminating bitterly over his egregious folly.

"Thank you very much," said a soft little voice, breaking in on his irritation like a silver bell on a moody silence.

He raised his head, and beheld Molly standing before him, looking up at him with grave sweet eyes. There was a hint of weariness in her drooping eyelids that appealed subtly to his own weary spirit. She seemed, standing there in the deserted street, to typify for the moment the aloofness of his mood.

"You've been good to me this morning," she went on in a quiet monotone, "mighty good!"

She stepped nearer to him until her breast almost touched his.

"I want you to look up at that pine over there until I tell you you can quit," she said as gravely as a child about to bestow a sugar plum.

Harry turned his eyes to the hill.

She stooped swiftly and drew the band of a holster and belt around his hips. Unmindful of his promise, he looked down on her in surprise.

"Don't be mad," she pleaded. "I got Frosty to get it for me from your shack, so I could put your gun in it. And now you'll wear it for me, won't you? I said you couldn't have it till you told me you were sorry. Well, you have told me you were sorry, in the best way—by doing something. I know how it is. I've had to work. It's no fun to be laughed at; and you'll always be as good and brave as you were this morning, won't you?"

A rush as of something beautiful swept over him. His eyes filled and he tried to speak, but turned away.

"Now, run along," she exclaimed gayly, giving him a little pat on the shoulder, "and don't forget you've got a job for this afternoon!"

She stood for a moment in the middle of the road watching him.

Graham, sitting under the eaves of the Little Nugget, surveyed the little scene with cynical eyes. He watched the girl walk toward the saloon. She had taken off her sunbonnet and the noon sun was gilding her hair. She was pensive and thoughtful, and looked down. He told himself that she did this because it was a becoming pose. Graham was the sort of man whom

pretence, craftiness, guile, always roused to arms. So long as he was antagonized, or thought he was, his bitterness and scorn were unappeasable; but once his ascendancy was freely acknowledged, he threw away its advantages with the utmost generosity. He thought he saw through this girl, and so he despised her and her tricks alike.

As she approached, Lafond arose and went inside the saloon, where he began to inquire of Frosty in regard to dinner. The girl sat down in the vacated chair. Beyond a curt little nod to Graham she did not notice his presence.

Over Tom Custer an eagle was wheeling slowly to and fro, barking with the mere delight of being on the wing. Molly fixed her eyes dreamily on the bird, but without apparent consciousness of more than the mere fact of its wide motion. Graham imperturbably whittled a pine stick, and whistled at the sky.

This state of affairs continued for some time.

"How do you keep the dirt from coming through the roof?" asked Molly suddenly, her mind, to all appearance, entirely on the work in hand.

Graham explained briefly.

"Thank you," said Molly.

After a few minutes more Graham shifted his knife into his left hand, and began idly to stab the bench with it. Several times he opened his mouth to speak.

"You've got him well trained," he observed finally, with a slight curl of the lip.

"Who? What do you mean?" she cried, genuinely surprised out of the indifference she had assumed.

"Him—Lafond. He knows when to go away. Why did you want to get rid of him?"

"I didn't want to get rid of him. It was so I could be alone."

"That's consistent! It was nothing of the kind. It was so you could be alone—with me."

She looked him over, flushing angrily. Then she deliberately turned her shoulder to him.

"You are very impudent," she remarked coldly. "You seem to forget that I don't even know you. I don't know why I sit here and listen, except that I am comfortable, and don't care to be driven away."

"You wanted to capture me some way or another," he went on musingly, catching a glimmer of the truth; "same as those poor fools out there in the sun. I'd just like to know how you meant to do it and what you'd have done to me. Would you have flattered me, or coaxed me, or what?"

The girl did not reply.

"How?" he urged, expecting an angry outburst, but profoundly indifferent to it.

"You are cruel," she answered softly, after a pause, "and very unjust." Her cheeks were glowing and there was a glint in her eye, but he could not see that. "They are only kind and good, not fools."

"Of course they're good, but they are good because you fool them into it," persisted Graham, spitefully pressing home his point. "You want to win 'em all, just like a woman, but you're too clumsy about it. Anybody can see through that sort of tommyrot, if he isn't a fool. So I call them fools, and I stick to it."

"With you it's different," she replied, hesitating almost before each word. "You ain't the same kind. I know it's foolish, but I can't help it, and I don't think I'm so much to blame. Perhaps I *am* trying to

make them like me. Is there so much harm in that? Nobody has ever liked me before. I have no mother and no sisters—only Mike. I want to be liked, and—and—I'm *sorry* if you don't think I ought to, but it can't be helped."

She looked out again at the eagle slowly circling over Tom Custer, with eyes vaguely troubled. Graham could examine her closely without the danger of detection. He did so.

There was something pathetically child-like about her after all, something delicate in the oval of her face and the sensitive modelling of her chin, which appealed to a man's protective instincts. Her eyes were so wide and blue and wistful, and again so pathetically young, like those of a little child gazing upon the shower-wet world from the safety of a window. Graham suddenly realized that this was no self-sufficient, capable woman whom he was so bluntly antagonizing, but only a pinafored innocent playing with forces of which she did not know the meaning. He began all at once to feel sorry for her. Against her probable future in this rough camp, how small the present looked, how little were her coquetries, her innocent wiles!

She sighed almost inaudibly. The eagle folded his wings and dropped like a plummet from the upper air, only to swoop upward on outspread pinions a moment later.

Graham began to be ashamed of himself. His thoughts took a new direction. He wondered what her previous history, her education, could have been. Her face was pure, her eyes clear. Could she have lived always with the half-breed? Both spoke English of an excellence beyond the common—in that

country, at least. Then he began idly to watch the sunlight running nimbly up and down a single loose tress of her hair, as the wind lifted it and let it fall.

The girl turned and caught his eyes fairly.

"What is it?" she asked simply.

"I was wondering," he replied with equal simplicity, "whether you had always lived with him."

"No," she replied, without pretending not to understand the purport of his question. Then, in the same little voice, in which was a trace, just a trace, of an infinite dreariness: "I have lived all my life at an Indian agency. He came and took me away a little while ago. He is good to me," she said doubtfully, "and I am glad to be away. The agent was good to me, but there were only a few people, and I only read and read and read, or rode and rode and rode, and knew nothing at all of people. I got tired of it. Nobody cared for me there. Nobody cares for me anywhere, I reckon, except Mike, and his caring for people doesn't count so very much."

She turned upon him again that vaguely troubled gaze, which seemed to see him, and yet to look beyond him.

"Poor little girl," said Graham, on a sudden deeply moved.

"Poor little girl!" he repeated with infinite tenderness, and took her idle hand in both of his.

"Poor little girl!" he said for the third time. She put her other hand before her eyes; then, releasing herself gently, she rose and glided through the door without a word.

Once inside the portal her eyes cleared with a snap. She laughed.

XVII

BLACK MIKE MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE AND STARTS A COLLECTION

IN the course of this same morning, Lafond had discovered an old acquaintance.

He arose early, and spent some time after breakfast investigating and criticising the premises. Frosty's administration had, it must be confessed, been rather slack, and there were many loose ends. These Black Mike gathered into a cat o' nine tails with which to lash his subordinate. After he had done more for Frosty's character in sixty minutes than that young man, unaided, could have accomplished in as many months, he left the scene of his reorganizations behind, and strolled about in the one narrow street of the village.

He soon saw all there was to be seen there. With a vague idea of finding his way to the famous Great Snake Mine, he rambled out from the double row of log cabins, around the bend, and into the lower gulch. He had defined to himself two things very clearly—that Billy Knapp was now easily the most important figure in the community, and that a continuance of this importance depended entirely on his effecting a combination of his group of claims with Eastern capital. In the Black Hills nearly all of the promising leads are of quartz, requiring in their development more expensive machinery than any ordinary man is able to afford. Until the good angel arrives, they are

so much crumbling red rock or white crystal; but with the erection of a stamp mill, within wagon distance, they become valuable. Mike had set himself to the task of depriving Billy Knapp at once of his property and of his prestige; but since he could not hold him up at the point of a pistol, as might have been done had it been the question of a watch or a scarf-pin, he did not at present see just how it was to be accomplished. Ruminating these matters, he found himself all at once in a cañon much grown with underbrush, full of birds, and possessing a general air of the gentler aspects of nature.

Immediately before him stood a double cabin, its two parts connected by a passage way. The foundations of its timbers were encircled by broad bands of red geraniums. Behind the buildings, chained to posts, he perceived three wild animals. One was a short, comical, and shaggy bear; the second, an equally furry but more eager-looking raccoon; the third, a bobcat with tasselled ears.

Mike paused and surveyed them with amusement. As he stood there the door of the cabin opened and the owner stepped out into the sunshine. The half-breed never forgot a face which a vital incident had impressed on his memory; and though this old, white-haired, mild-eyed man had passed in and out of his life in the space of one evening fifteen years ago, Lafond recognized without difficulty the stranger whose words had given him so powerful an impetus toward his new way of life. It was Durand, the butterfly hunter.

He was little changed. And again the coarser man felt, as fifteen years before, the air of gentle and quaint

courtesy, which a keener observer would have associated with an old-fashioned society now quite passed away. It should have gone with ruffles and silken hose, with powdered hair and silver shoe buckles.

The naturalist caught sight of the newcomer and approached.

"They are quite gentle," he assured, explaining the beasts. He rubbed the heavy fur of the raccoon the wrong way. "Ah, Jacques," he said to the little animal, relapsing quaintly into a sort of old-time speech, "thy hair doth resemble in stiffness of texture the bristles of thine own curry brush."

The raccoon uttered his high, purring over-note, and seized the man's fingers with his little black hands, almost human. The bear waved his paws appealingly. The bobcat danced back and forth at the end of its leash. "Peace, my children," chided the old man, bestowing on each a pat. "It is not yet the hour of noon." He stooped to unsnap the raccoon's chain; and then, as though recalling the half-breed's presence, he turned with an air of apology.

"You are a stranger here?" he asked. "Yes? And you walk this morning for your pleasure? Yes? That happens not often in these parts." He went on, conversing shyly but easily, with the obvious desire of pleasing the half-breed rather than himself. Lafond had opportunity to observe the great solidity of the logs composing the cabin walls, and to recognize that the structure must belong to the earlier period of the primitive architecture of the Hills—for there are such periods.

"You have lived here long," he suggested, following out this inference.

"Yes," laughed the old man softly, "very long. The camp there came to me. I was an old timer when the first house was built."

After a little, they entered the cabin together, and Lafond found himself in a sheet-ceiled room, strewn with all sorts of literary and scientific junk. The imagination could discover much food for speculation in the curiosities literally heaped about the apartment, but most wonderful of all, seizing the eye, holding it from all else, were the scores of shallow glass-fronted boxes hanging everywhere on the wall. They were lined with white paper pasted over a layer of cork. In them, row after row, were impaled butterflies of many colors. Thousands of the pretty insects were there outspread, varying in size from the tiny blue *Lycaena* to the great *Troilus* or the gorgeous yellow and black *Turnus*. They were exquisitely prepared, with just the right lift on the wings, just the proper balance of the long antennae, until it seemed that they must be on the point of flight, and one almost expected that in another moment the air would be filled with a fluttering, many-hued splendor.

The men seated themselves in two home-made chairs. The raccoon, evidently from old winter-time habit, waddled in a dignified fashion to the fireless stove, where he curled up like a door-mat with keen, bright eyes. Mike's gaze roamed about the apartment.

"You are a great scientist," he observed, intending the remark for a compliment.

"In a way, in a way," replied the old man humbly. "One must occupy the mind when one is alone, and what task more fitting to our highest faculties than that of investigating, with all due reverence, the workings of God's mechanism?"

He said it with a simple piety which could not provoke a smile. Michaïl Lafond caught himself wondering what he did there. Surely there was nothing to interest him in stuffed insects and a garrulous old man, especially as the conversation insisted on retaining its formal footing.

"You are not a miner?" the entomologist inquired, after a moment's pause.

"No," replied Mike.

"I am glad to hear it. I like not this eager scrambling for what does so little good. I too once—— But now I am content; yes, content. There is always good if one will but find it. I myself might with justice be accused of being a miner. I find my leads, I develop them, I assay my ores; but always in miniature—on a small scale."

Then, in a flash, Michaïl Lafond saw at least the outlines of his plan, and he knew why he had come in here to talk to the garrulous old man.

"You know the assay, then?" he inquired conversationally.

"In a modest way—a few simple tests."

"But that is much. Do you not know that it is at Rapid, in the School of Mines, that the nearest assayer is? You have a profession here at your hands."

A sudden scream broke through the apartment, a rush of wings, a growl. The old man ran nimbly to the stove, and rescued the little raccoon from the savage attacks of a magpie. The magpie sailed back to his perch on one of the butterfly cases, where he ruffled his feathers indignantly. The raccoon curled up in the old man's lap.

"You are French?" inquired the latter, with more interest than he had hitherto shown.

"I have some French blood," replied Lafond cautiously.

"I knew it," said Durand, immensely pleased. "I am rarely mistaken. It was a twist of your words that suggested it, an idiom. *Et maintenant nous pouvons causer*," he added in the purest Parisian accent.

"*Oui, oui, oui*," cried the half-breed, suddenly swept up by an uncontrollable excitement he could not himself understand. "*La belle langue!*"

He felt an unwonted expansion of the heart at thus hearing once more the language of his youth. The formality of the interview was gone. They conversed freely, swiftly, animatedly. Durand had been educated in Paris, and had a thousand reminiscences to impart. He told of many quaint customs, and Lafond, with growing emotion, recalled similar or analogous customs among his own expatriated branch of the race in the pine forests of Canada. His sullen, taciturn manner broke. He became the Gaul. He gesticulated, he overflowed, his eye lighted up, he said a thousand things.

After a time Durand opened a chest at the foot of the bed, from which he abstracted a bottle and two long-stemmed glasses. These he placed on the table with a quaint little air of ceremony.

"Sir," said he, "we must know each other better. We speak each the language we love. We talk of old days. Sir," he concluded, bowing with stately grace as he poured the red wine into the glasses, "I ask you to drink wine with me to our acquaintance. My name is Durand."

He inclined, his hand to his heart, and somehow there seemed to be nothing ridiculous in the act.

"I am Michaïl Lafond," replied the half-breed simply.

A silence fell. The realities came back to Lafond's mind.

"I would ask you a favor," he said abruptly.

"Name it; it is yours."

"I want you to teach me how to make an assay."

"It would be a pleasure. I will do it gladly."

"Is it difficult?"

"Not very."

"When shall we begin?"

"When you say."

Lafond reflected. "Well, I will bring some ore in a day or two." Then, after a pause, as though in deference to the attitude he knew the old man held in regard to such things, he added, "It must be very interesting, this making of gold from the rock."

"And more interesting still," supplemented Durand gently, "is the thrill of a shared thought."

The raccoon stood on his hind legs in his master's lap, and began deliberately to investigate the contents of his pockets, deftly inserting his little black hands, almost human, and watching the man's face with alert eyes. Durand took the animal's small head between both his palms, and smiled at him affectionately.

"Ah, Jacques, *polisson!* Thou art a rogue, and dost learn early what thy master's race doth teach. See, Lafond, how the little villain would even now rob the very one who doth give to him his daily bread and all that which he hath." He softly rubbed the small, black nose with the flat of his palm, much to its owner's

disgust. Jacques backed off deliberately to the floor, where he sneezed violently, while Durand gazed at him with a kindly smile.

After leaving the cabin, Black Mike no longer slouched along unseeing. He burned with the inspiration of an idea. Just where the idea would lead him, or how it would work out in its final processes, he did not know; but he had long since grown accustomed to relying blindly on such exaltations of confidence as the present, sure that details would develop when needed. He believed in letting the pot boil.

Through the town he walked with brisk, business-like steps, out into the higher gulch. There he soon came upon signs of industry. Up a hill he could hear the ring of axes and the occasional rush of a falling tree, sounding like grouse drumming in the spring. He followed the sound. Half way up the knoll, he discovered a cabin and three shafts. A rude sign announced that this represented the surface property of the Great Snake Mining and Milling Company. Lafond halted abruptly when he saw the sign. For perhaps half an hour he looked over, with the eye of a connoisseur, the three piles of ore at the mouths of the three shafts, approving silently of the evidence of slate walls, crumbling between his strong fingers the oxygenated quartz, putting his tongue to the harder specimens to bring out their color by moisture, gazing with some curiosity at the darker hornblende. Finally he selected a number of the smaller specimens, with which he filled the ample pockets of his shooting-coat. After this he returned to town and the Little Nugget saloon, where he emptied his pockets on the bar.

"Get some of that packin' stuff out behind," he com-

manded Frosty, "and with it construct a shelf there by the mirror."

He stood over Frosty while the latter, frightened into clumsiness, hammered his fingers, the wall, the rude shelf, anything but the nail. Finally, Lafond thrust him aside with a curse, and finished the job himself. On the completed shelf he ranged about half of the specimens which he had picked up from the ore dumps. Beneath these he tacked a label, indicating that they were from the Great Snake Mine.

Then he joined Jack Graham outside, and settled down to watch the group of men engaged in laying the foundation timbers of a new log shack.

XVIII

TIRED WINGS

IN spite of the fact that she had laughed at Graham's blindness in falling into her trap, Molly Lafond felt enough curiosity to induce her to enter into several conversations with him during the course of that afternoon. He sat by the door whistling. Out in the sun the men cut logs, notched ends, heaved and pushed. The girl alternated between personal encouragement of the workers, and a curious examination of the idler.

Graham interested her because he puzzled her. The young man no longer held to the quizzical and cynical attitude he had assumed in the morning, but neither did he at once manifest that personal interest which she had imagined inevitable. He caught at her statement that she had done nothing but "read, read, read." In the course of twenty minutes he had made her most keenly aware of her deficiencies, and that without the display of any other motive than a frank desire to discuss the extent of her knowledge. He opened to her fields whose existence she had never suspected; he showed her that she had but superficially examined those she had entered. Authors she had much admired he disposed of cavalierly, and in their stead substituted others of whom she had never heard.

"I like Bulwer," she remarked, secure in her classic because it had been the only one of Sweeney's collection to come in a set and bound in brown leather.

"Bulwer, yes," said Graham, pulling his little

moustache, and speaking, as his habit sometimes was, more to himself than to his companion. "We all go through that stage, but we get over it after awhile. You see, he's superficial and awfully pedantic. There is much beauty in it, too. I remember in one of his novels—I forget which—there is a picture of a child tossing her ball skyward, with eyes turned upward to the skies, that is worth a good deal."

"It's in *What Will He Do with It?*" cried Molly, aglow at being able to interpolate correctly.

"Yes," assented Graham, indifferently. "It has something to do with youth, I think. Before our critical judgment grows up and finds him out, there is a peculiar elevation about Bulwer's themes and treatment. His world is blown; but it is big, and his figures have a certain scornful nobility about them. If I were to compete with the gentleman under discussion," he concluded, with a slight laugh, "I would say that he throws upon the true gold of youthful ideals, hopes, and dreams, the light of his own tinsel."

Molly was subdued, humbled. She was deprived at a stroke of all her weapons. For the first time she found herself looking up to a man, and wondering whether she could ever meet him on terms of equality. She caught herself covertly scrutinizing Graham to see if he too realized his advantage. He was genuinely interested; that was all. He seemed to take it for granted that she was already on his level. This encouraged her somewhat.

Whenever she again joined the group of sweating men at work on her house, she felt subtly that she was returning from a far country. She had brought back with her something new. The nature of the con-

versation had lifted her to the contemplation of fresh possibilities of human intercourse. With a defiant toss of the head she indulged herself to the extent of imagining several Bulwer-like conversations, in which she dealt out brilliant generalities to the universal applause. It was the first flight her wings had essayed; the first charm not merely physical that she had experienced with one of the other sex. She felt she was going to like this man Graham.

And yet that very elation was one of the reasons why, after dinner in the " hotel," she walked with Billy Knapp, although Graham was plainly waiting for her. It had been her first flight; her wings were tired. The reaction had come.

The dinner itself, and its manner, had much to do with bringing this to her consciousness. Entering at one end of the hotel dining-room, she first became aware of the cook stove at the other, and, behind it, tins. Down the centre extended the three bench-flanked board tables, polished smooth by the combined influences of spilled grease and much rubbing. At certain short intervals had been stationed tin plates, over each of which were stacked, pyramid fashion, an iron knife, fork and spoon. Tin cups spaced the plates. Down the centre of each table were distributed thick white china receptacles containing sugar, lumpy and brown with coffee; salt; and butter on the point of melting. At dinner-time the cook placed between these receptacles capacious tins, steaming respectively, with fried and boiled pork, boiled potatoes, corn-meal mush, and canned tomatoes; besides corn bread, soda biscuits, and a small quantity of milk for the coffee. Then, wiping his glistening face on the red-

checked little towel that hung at his waist, he entered the "office" and, seizing a huge bell, clanged forth, now to the right, now to the left, that his meal was ready.

The men ate in their shirt sleeves, those farthest half obscured by the clouds of steam from the uncovered dishes. The cook stove, the dishes, and the men heated the low unventilated room almost to suffocation. They gobbled their food rapidly, taking noisy swigs of the coffee from the tin cups. As each finished, he wiped his plate clean with the soft inside of a soda biscuit, drew his knife across the bread once or twice, swallowed the gravy-laden biscuit at one mouthful, and departed without further ceremony into the outer air.

It was all thoroughly Western, thoroughly material, thoroughly restful to tired wings.

As the meal progressed, the exaltation faded slowly. Molly received the assiduous attentions of everybody. After dinner, as has been said, she and the wonderful Billy Knapp disappeared into the twilight, leaving the disconsolate miners to find their way to the Little Nugget when it pleased them to do so.

Billy talked. He poured out his confidences. He told how great was Billy, how bright were Billy's prospects, how important were Billy's responsibilities. He was glad to show this young girl the town; it was Billy's town. He was pleased to tell her the names of the hills hereabouts; these hills concealed within their depths the veins of Billy's lodes. He delighted in giving the history of the men they met; for these men looked up to Billy as the architect of their future fortunes. He spoke enthusiastically of the prospects.

"Thar is a lode," said he earnestly, "over on the

J. G. fraction that's shore th' purtiest bit of quartz lead you ever see. The walls is all of slate, running jest 's slick side by side, with a clear vein between 'em, and she'll run 'way up, free millin'. I tell you what, Miss Molly, thar's big money in it, thar shorely is! When I get those Easte'n capitalists interested, and ready to put a little *salt* in, and git up a few mills and necessary buildin's, you'll jest see things hummin' in this yar kentry."

Out of the darkness a silent little figure glided and fell in step with the girl.

"Hullo, bub," said Billy indifferently, and went on to tell what he was going to do. Billy had great plans.

Molly said nothing to the new member of their party, but she reached out her hand and patted the little cotton-covered shoulder. She looked about at the dark town and the hills, and drew a deep breath. This was real, tangible. She felt at home in it, and she was adequate to all that its conditions might bring forth. Above all, she was confident here. Graham and his ideas seemed to her at the moment quite nebulous and phantom-like.

"Let's go to the Little Nugget," she suggested suddenly.

They turned to retrace their steps. As they passed an open doorway, a big man darted out with unnatural agility and seized the Kid by the scruff of the neck.

"I beg your pardon, miss, whom I am overjoyed to meet. Standing as I do *in loco parentis*, the claims of the rising generation constrain me to postpone that more intimate acquaintance which your attractions demand of my desire. Come along here, you!" and he dragged the Kid, struggling and crying out, into the dark cabin.

"Ain't he great?" cried Billy, with real enthusiasm. "Ain't he just? They ain't a man in th' whole Northwest as can sling the langwidge that man can when he tries. You just ought to see him when he cuts loose, you just ought."

"Who is he?" asked Molly.

"Him? What, him? He's Moroney!"

His tone denied the need of further question. They entered the saloon.

The first half hour of Molly's evening in the Little Nugget was constrained. Up to this point she had met the men of the camp under extraordinary circumstances. Now she was called upon to face them in their time of relaxation and accustomed comfort. Such moments of leisure crystallize for us men everywhere our opinions of people. Anybody is welcome to sail with us, hunt with us, fish with us, ride with us, work with us, provided he is personally agreeable and understands the game. We are not so undiscriminating when it comes to a study fire and an easy chair. Translate the study fire and the easy chair to the Little Nugget and a quiet game, and you will see one reason for the constraint. No unkindness was intended. The situation was merely, but inevitably, awkward for everybody.

In such emergencies as this, where a creature of coarser fibre would fail, Molly's hereditary fineness of instinct stood her in good stead. She saw intuitively the attitude she should take. In the first place, she held herself in the background, left the lead to others, behaved as if she suspected herself of being an intruder; so that the men suddenly felt themselves very paternal and adoptive.

In the second place, she encouraged them to show off; which they did with the utmost heartiness. The first embarrassment wore away before long, and Molly took her place in the corner of the bar with the tacit approval of every man in the room.

The remainder of the evening was enjoyable. Some features of it would scarcely have impressed a refined Easterner favorably, for these were rough men, with crude tastes and passions. Once having accepted the girl as one of themselves, they lapsed to some extent, though not entirely, into their accustomed manner. It is a little difficult sometimes to interpret the West in terms of the East. An act which in the older country would be significant of too licensed freedom, on the frontier is a matter of course. Everything depends on the point of view and the attitude of mind.

Around Molly Lafond seethed a constantly changing group of men. They joked boisterously at one another and at her. The standard of wit was the saying of insulting things with a laugh that showed that the remark held in itself something of facetious sarcasm. Through thinner skins it would have bitten cruelly. Behind this lively group sat another, more silent, smoking the amused pipe of contemplation, all alert to the chances of conversational battle, ready to jump up and enter the lists whenever a bright idea suggested itself. In the corner just behind the bar, lurked Black Mike, keeping a sinister eye on Frosty's dispensations. The faro dealer called his cards imperturbably over his scantily patronized game. Occasionally someone, glowing with the good-natured excitement of jesting, would break away from the laughing group, and, standing the while, would stake a few red chips on a turn or so of the cards.

Peter, obsessed of some sudden and doggish affection, ceased his restless wanderings. He took up his position, resting on one hip, both hind legs to one side, directly beneath Molly's feet. There his shaggy head was of such a height that the girl could just reach it with the point of her shoe. From time to time, when the exigency demanded such a pose, she looked down prettily, and stirred the animal's button ears with her little foot. On such occasions Peter gravely rolled his eyes upward and wriggled his stump of a tail.

A young fellow by the name of Dave Kelly stood nearest her. He was a handsome young fellow, with a laughing boyish face. As time went on, he became more and more elated and sure of himself. Occasionally, when the press of men behind would push him forward, he would reach across the girl to regain his balance. Once he put his hand lightly on the point of her shoulder. He paused, with a strange delicious thrill at the feel of the round young arm under the loose stuff of the gown, which slipped beneath his grasp to emphasize the smoothness of the skin. Aware of the touch, she looked toward him for a minute, laughing. Somehow it gave him a strange feeling of intimacy with her, inexplicable, subtle. Without knowing why he did so, he felt his own shoulder underneath his loose flannel shirt. It gave the same impression, only rougher, coarser.

There suddenly sprang into his mind a sense of physical kinship between himself and her. He took frequent opportunities of repeating the contact, always lightly, always with the same delicious thrill. At each touch the girl turned to him for a vaguely smiling in-

stant. She was absorbed in the men about her. The youth at her side had fallen silent, but her good nature extended to everybody.

Late in the evening somebody suggested that Frosty had been singularly unemployed. Glasses were filled. Molly's was handed to her.

"I don't want any," said she.

"It'll do y' good," "Try her," "Aw, come on!" urged a dozen voices.

She sipped a little. It tasted to her like liquid fire, with a strange gagging property as it reached the region of the epiglottis. She sputtered and choked.

"Ugh!" she shuddered. "Ugh! I couldn't get a glass of that stuff down if it killed me." She shut her eyes and shivered with a pretty disgust. "I simply can't," she repeated.

"Ain't ye got anything else, Frosty?" they cried reproachfully. "That stuff's purty rank fer a lady, that's right. Skirmish around thar, an' see what y' kin discover."

Frosty skirmished around, and finally bobbed up, red-faced, with a bottle of some light wine. Molly drank this slowly, with little more satisfaction. Some people never care for the taste of anything with alcohol in it, and the cheap wine had more than the suspicion of a wire edge. But she liked the warm glow that followed, and she found that in a moment or so she was much pleased with herself.

"Give me another of those," she smiled to Frosty, holding out the empty glass. The men chuckled. This was something like.

Molly drank the other glass. In a few minutes she felt sleepy. "I'm going to turn in," she said abruptly,

and slid down on the unsuspecting Peter. They disentangled the trouble with merriment. Molly consoled Peter. The room was full of noise and light.

"May I take you over?" Kelly was asking in her ear. She nodded assent. The other men looked chagrined. It had not occurred to them.

Dave Kelly and Molly stepped gayly from the heated, garish saloon into the still night. The contrast made them feel yet gayer. They remarked on the stars and the moon, to do which it became necessary to look upward and slacken their steps. He was very close to her. He slipped his arm about her waist, his great hand resting firmly beneath her small bust, and they stumbled on together in breathless silence. He felt very bold and elated and happy.

Suddenly she looked down with an air of mock surprise. "What is this?" she cried, lifting one of Dave's fingers and letting it fall. "Why, it looks like your hand!"

"That's so!" grinned Dave.

"I wonder how that could have got there!"

Dave, finding himself unequal to persiflage, made no reply. She nestled up to him a little and sighed. She liked it. She had not the slightest idea that there was anything out of the way in it. Why should she? Morals, as we understand them, she had never been taught. They slowly approached the wagon, which during the day had been dragged to a less conspicuous but more distant locality.

Ah, Molly, Molly, those wings are very tired!

At the moment when Kelly first pressed the girl to him, he experienced a sudden lessening of her charm. It was not that she was less feminine, or that, in his

eyes, she had lost any moral excellence by her easy surrender. Dave had probably as rudimentary ideas of the finer moralities as Molly herself. But one very definite element of her attraction had been given up—that of mystery, of remoteness, of difference between herself and him. She was no longer a creature of a wonderful and other sphere; she had become the female of his species.

All this was subtle and slight and quite unappreciated and unanalyzed by Dave himself. But the keen intuition of the girl discovered it. She felt the difference. Suddenly she became aware of the fact that whatever a woman gives to a man takes something from her attraction, and adds something to his. With the discovery, she resolutely put his hand away.

"That's enough of that," she said in the sensible voice which some women use so effectually.

Dave, unwilling to let the sensation go before he had drained it, attempted to seize her by force. She slipped away and ran like a deer to her wagon, gleaming white through the darkness. Dave sprang in pursuit. At the instant Peter, who had followed unperceived, leaped with a growl and fastened his teeth into Dave's cowhide boot. The miner paused a moment undecided, and then, his natural good nature coming to his rescue, he laughed. An answering laugh echoed from the direction of the wagon.

"That's a pretty trick," he called, trying to disengage Peter's jaws. Peter shook his head savagely and growled.

"You ought to learn to run," came the voice from the safety of the wagon.

"Run!" laughed Dave. "Run with a dawg hang-

in' to you? Call him and see if you can get him to leave go."

"Dog?" repeated the voice in puzzled tones.

"Yes, dog—this yere Peter. He seems to have took up with you-all. He's got me by th' laig!"

Molly reappeared cautiously. Then she saw Peter, and advanced boldly. The two young people looked at the eager and determined little dog, and laughed with great good nature. Their crisis had passed, fortunately without harm to either. Molly took Peter by the collar. Peter at once let go.

"Good night," said Molly decidedly to Dave.

"Good night," said Dave, and turned back.

Molly walked on to the wagon, closely followed by Peter. As she climbed in, she turned and caught sight of the little animal, eyeing her wistfully.

"Want to come in?" said she.

Peter jumped to the whiffletree, then upon the seat, then into the wagon. Molly followed.

"Peter," said she, "we won't do that any more. I don't believe it's a good scheme. What do you think, dog?"

Peter wagged his stump of a tail, but as it was quite dark, this expression of approval was lost. "I hope he won't say anything about it," she went on reflectively. "But if he does"—she tossed her head—"much good may it do any of them!" Then, after some time, "Peter, let's go to sleep."

Peter whined with content.

XIX

THE BROAD WHITE ROAD

COPPER CREEK had begun as a half-way house, and had ended as a camp. Thus the hotel was its oldest structure.

Situated about half way between Rockerville and Custer, on the old Spring Creek trail, it often happened that the stage running from Rapid to the last-named town would stop for the evening meal, or even for the night, at the little log structure which Bill Martin had been sagacious enough to erect there. The soil was good for potatoes, which was lucky, for Bill Martin could never have prospered as a hotel keeper pure and simple; because purity, simplicity, and temperance principles have nothing to do with a Western inn. Bill cooked, made beds, and raised potatoes. Then a fortuitous "grub staker" discovered the Great Snake lode. A town sprang up in the night, so Bill Martin hired Black Jack and built additions. And finally, since his food was good and cheap, it came to be the proper thing to eat late dinners at two dollars a week in the long dining-room of Bill Martin's new building. After the Little Nugget, a later but more enterprising venture, Bill Martin's Prairie Dog, with its small office, its big eating room, its little square bedrooms above the office, and its ancient and musty copies of distant journals, was acknowledged to be the most important institution of the place.

From the narrow, roofless stoop its proprietor

looked out tranquilly on the growth of the camp. He was a tall, cadaverous, facetious individual, slightly stooped, with thin impassive face, deep eyes, and a beard that seemed always just two days old. He spoke with a drawl that was at first natural, but later, as the quaint old fellow grew to appreciate its humorous qualities, it took on a faint color of affectation. He adopted always the paternal attitude, as was clearly his right.

Bill Martin was probably the only man who could have told you the history of Copper Creek, for he had been, through all of its changes of population, the one stable character. First came the original " grub staker " and a score more like him—impecunious, giving, many of them, their labor and experience, in exchange for tools and provisions furnished them by a speculator in the towns. The speculator took half of what was found. These men were hardy, bold, enduring, skilful. They grubbed about in the hills with the keen restless instinct of ants over a mould of earth, moving rapidly, pausing often, lighting finally, with an accuracy that to the outsider would have seemed something preternatural, on the one quartz vein of the many, or the one significant lead in the multitude of systems that seamed the country in all directions. Thereupon they staked out claims with white pine posts, and blasted little troughs to show milk-white quartz or red ore filling. And finally they disappeared, like bats before daylight, leaving not an echo of themselves to recall their presence to the hills in which they had toiled.

Their places were taken by the speculator, the miner with a little money, the small capitalist willing to invest and not unwilling to work with his own hands.

These men paid a certain modest amount to the first discoverers for the chance to take chances on the embryo mines. The prospector never had the patience to wait, or scheme, or develop, to the justification of a better price. The excitement of the chase was his. He was a master who sketched, in bold comprehensive strokes, the design of a work which men patient in the little details must fill in with color and value. Having thus outlined the lifetimes of men, the prosperity of the whole great industry that was to be, he was content to move on to where a new and virgin country offered a fresh canvas to his creative genius. He was always poor, but he never pitied himself.

The new owner, then, represented the investor. He expected no immediate returns. He was willing to wait. Meanwhile he spent as much time in going over the fifty thousand square yards of his one claim as his predecessor had in examining the whole twenty-five hundred square miles of the district. He carefully analyzed the lead, its tendencies, its virtues, its defects. When he had fully satisfied his mind, he sank neat, square-timbered shafts, from fifty to two hundred feet in depth, from which ramified tunnels, both across and along the drift. The débris he piled outside, without attempting to save its value. In this manner, gradually, he came to possess points of view from which the next purchaser of the claim could plainly see its worth and possibilities.

For this second proprietor never expected to make his profit from the ore. That accrued later, and to another man. When the country became a little known, the other man would happen along; he, in his turn, would be willing to invest; and the present

holder of the property, the middleman in this queerly constructed industry, could measure the success of his undertaking by the difference between the price he had paid to the original "grub staker" and the price he now received from the future developer. Meanwhile, he worked hard with his hands.

Thus the camp presented the phenomenon of a community prospering on nothing more tangible than hope. When the cabins began to crowd thicker and thicker between the walls of the little gulch, Bill Martin had been forced to give up agriculture because of lack of room; so that Copper Creek produced absolutely nothing, not even potatoes. Every cent of its present and actual value came from outside, either with the men themselves, or with some investor who brought in the price of wages for a contemplated improvement. Only as long as there existed in men's minds the comparative certainty of a future stamp mill, by which the quartz could be made to give up its treasure, would the machinery of life run well. Hope depended on confidence.

The miners built themselves cabins in which to live, and so there came into being a town. It was a dusty, new little town; but venerable in its age—old air from the first. The cabins themselves were low and dark, flanking the street closely, a sort of monotone of brown, by which the stable, the saloon, and the hotel were thrown into stronger relief; the one by virtue of its wide-open door, the other two because of their porch and painted front respectively. These structures held the eye. One noticed the cane chairs on the stoop; the bench outside the saloon; the dumped down saddles, the hay dust, the lazy loafers about the stable.

And always one drew aside instinctively to the edge of the broad, white, dusty street, as if to let pass a horse race, or a train of cars, or something equally swift and irresistible.

The camp lived on each side of that river of blinding white; never in it. Later, perhaps, when Copper Creek reached the industrial or producing stage, and became domestic, it would be a Rubicon over which contending armies of small boys would dispute the supremacy of the north and south side of the town. Now it wore a constant air of being quite empty. Perhaps nothing was more characteristic, struck the eye more forcibly, lingered longer in the memory as the dominant note in the impressionistic picture of the place, than this single silent road; not even the sombre cabins, or the great pine-clad hills, or the clear mountain air imparting a quality of its own to the very appearance of things, or the little singing brook that ran behind one row of cabins and the stable, or the eagles wheeling and screaming so far up in the blue Western sky. The town seemed to draw back on either side of the road to avoid spoiling its effect, overawed by it, humbled by its dignified solemnity. Copper Creek would have been willing to have its history recounted by that road, which was primarily, indeed, the cause of its being.

And Bill Martin, in the cane chair of his stoop, the only man capable of recounting that history, owed most of his unique knowledge of events to the ancient thoroughfare. Men came from the lower gulch, abode their brief hour, and disappeared into the thin air of the upper curve. From one wing, across the white stage, out by the other wing, the actors changed; the setting remained always the same.

Now each morning early the old innkeeper saw defile before his windows the Optimist, intent on developing his dream. A motley crew, these Optimists, having little in common with one another but the inner spirit of hope. There was Old Mizzou, short, squat, grizzled, good-natured, with back-sloping, bald forehead, and a seven dollar suit of clothes, from which he suffered severely, because it was "store made." He owned a little claim over beyond Ragged Top, on which he made infinitesimal progress. No one seemed to believe it amounted to much, Old Mizzou least of all, but he was old, and he had lived the life, and so he liked to amuse himself still in playing at the game; contented to chip away a few slivers of rock in order to persuade himself that he was a miner, to sip a little whiskey so that men might honor him as a drinker, to talk so loudly from his warm corner in the Little Nugget that the sound of his voice might persuade him he was a bold bad man; although everyone knew that Old Mizzou had never harmed a fly.

And then again, there was Jack Graham, the Easterner, but never the tenderfoot. His selections of claims had been judicious. He was not afraid of work. He had the good sense of the timely word, so the men trusted and liked him, even though he was college-bred and quiet-mannered and a little aloof.

And again, there was Dave Kelly, who was red-cheeked, and blushed, but was a good man for all that; and Cheyenne Harry, who owned two claims and never did any work on them; and Houston, the strongest man in the camp; and, of course, the great Moroney. These, and a hundred like them, were actual miners, wielding sledge, drill and pick. Besides them were

others—Frosty, and the faro man, and Bill Martin, and the stable boys, and the proprietor of the New York Emporium, all of whom lived in ministering to the wants of a prosperity that was still in the air.

Each morning the camp emptied itself into the hills. The claims were usually held in partnership; when they were not, two of the men "traded work," so that they could labor in pairs. At rude forges near the shafts they sharpened their heavy steel drills, resembling crowbars, beating the red-hot point out with the sledges. Then one held, while the other struck—crash! Turn, crash! Turn, crash! And so on, in unwearying succession, until the hole became so clogged with the powdered rock and the water poured in to cool the drill, that it had to be spooned out with a special T-shaped instrument.

After a time the hole would be deep enough. The operators would load it, touch the fuse, scamper for shelter. The earth would become cumbered with broken vein matter, and this had to be removed laboriously with pick and shovel. When the shaft grew deeper, the fuse was cut a little longer, and the miners would climb out as fast as they could on a notched pole. Cases have been known when that was not fast enough; as the time old Brady, the paralytic, was blown out along with the vein filling, and died almost before the horse was saddled to go for the doctor at Custer, fifteen miles away.

The rock was hard and the immediate results invisible. Well earned was the title of Optimist, for that these coarse, untrained men should so devote themselves to a futurity certainly indicated optimism, and of a fine sort. If the capitalist should not come! The net

result would be a few acres of hilly stony land, a well hole where there was no water, and an exhausted pocket-book.

At noon some of the miners ate a lunch which they had brought with them, heating coffee over the little fire used to warm the powder; while others picked up something in their own cabins. Bill Martin's table entertained only the gambler, Graham, Cheyenne Harry, and two other men, whom the camp laughingly designated as "proud." About four or five o'clock, the workers returned from the claims. At six sharp Black Jack served dinner to the entire camp. Then came the Little Nugget, a quiet smoke, a glass or so of whiskey, and a sound night's sleep.

Sometimes there was a celebration. One or two members of the little community were inclined to become a trifle over joyous too often for their health. The standard of humor and manners was not one of the most quiet and delicate. But, on the whole, Copper Creek was no worse nor better than a hundred other similar prospecting camps in the West.

Naturally, to such a community, in the hobbledehoy stage of its development, as it were, the advent of so strange a phenomenon as a woman was in the nature of an event. Later, when it had become used to the sex and its possibilities and limitations, the personal relation might become the motive of much very complicated action; but now it accepted Molly as a bright spot of color on a gray canvas, as a holiday, as a fortuitous bit of music, as an unexpected burst of sunshine in the winter. For all her strong feminine charm, she was to most of them as sexless as a boy. They were too many; and she was alone. The spectacle of one

gigantic rivalry for her favor would have been grotesque, and no one has a keener instinctive sense of the ridiculous than the Westerner. They accepted her fascination as a real but impersonal influence. In her they honored the great abstraction, woman; and in himself each individual saw, not his own single personality, but the blended apotheosis of the man of Copper Creek. Molly was held in partnership, each miner making not only his own impression for her good graces, but the camp's as well.

And this without mawkish sentimentality or comic opera delicacy of conduct. It must not be understood that the newcomer became any romantic idol of the camp, or that the men displayed the old-fashioned courtesy affected by the miners in Western romances. These were pioneers. Their lives were rough, and their conduct matched their lives. When angry, they said very emphatic things in inelegant language. When facetious, their jokes were apt to be as broad as the prairies themselves. When at their ease, they chewed tobacco, or ate with their knives, or forgot to wash their shirts that week, or sat in their shirt sleeves with the collars of said garment wide open. But they never equalled the frankness of a Parisian soirée in talking of or joking at some natural but usually unmentioned functions of life; nor were they ever without that solid bedrock of good nature which is the American's saving grace. Molly Lafond led a safe life among them because she trusted them. In the face of that trust no one of them conceived the possibility of harming her. This feeling was personal however. Nobody would have felt called upon to protect her against anyone who did conceive the possi-

bility. In other words, she took just the independent position in the community which would have been accorded to a man coming in from outside. She was a good comrade.

In her elation at finally escaping the restrictions and petty bickerings of her life at the Indian agency, Molly had turned eagerly first of all to the conquest of the masculine heart. This was theory, built up from a long course of romantic reading. The heroine always "ruled her little court." Molly would like to rule her little court also. She felt the genuineness of her fascination, the possession of which she realized to the full degree—that sort of fascination which succeeds where beauty, intellect, spirituality fail. It was a power, great, untried, unmeasured. Naturally her first impulse was to test it, to use it. She luxuriated in it. Nothing could be more delightful than to command and be obeyed; to smile into answering, smiling faces; to frown and see swiftly, as in a mirrored reflection, the countenances about her become dark. That was natural.

But after a little she found herself tiring of it. The game was too easy. Even from the first evening, when she had astounded and subdued the whole community at one fell blow, she had never experienced the slightest difficulty in getting these men to like her. Why should she? She was young and pretty and dainty, and delicately commanding and winsome, and she knew instinctively each man's weak point. One and all gave her unqualified approbation. There is no fun in asserting yourself, if everyone agrees with you; and to be a queen you must maintain your dignity and aloofness. It was a pose. You cannot be hail-fellow with your subjects.

So little by little, as the joy of out door life got into her veins, as it does into the veins of every healthy young creature in the open air of the Hills, she dropped the coquette. Then she first began to appreciate the real charm of things, and she was perfectly happy. Not a tiny cloud of regret veiled the tiniest corner of her skies.

The cabin had been finished within the week, but under the advice of the builders she did not move into it until nearly a month later.

A new shack never dries thoroughly in less than three weeks; and, besides, the sawdust from the new insect borings always pours down from the walls and ceilings in aggravating abundance. A dozen other houses were placed at her disposal. The men were only too glad to double up temporarily. But the summer air was warm, and Molly was by now as used to the narrow confines of her canvas-top, as a yachtsman to the cabin of his boat. She declined their offers and continued to live in the wagon. She was quite content to wait thus. In the meantime she took much delight in fixing up various curtains, chaircovers and tablecloths from light fabrics unearthed at the New York Emporium, and in cultivating carefully boxes of geraniums, almost the only garden flower in the hills. Curiously enough she enjoyed this. Perhaps it was a hereditary bequest from her unsuspected New England ancestry.

Jack Graham lent her many books, which she perused greedily. She had never seen a large city, or a boat, or a trolley car, or a tailor-made gown; but that counted little. Such things are not so much matters of actual experience as of natural aptitude. Some

people can go to Europe and get less out of it than do those who read steamer advertisements at home. Molly Lafond was keen of intellect and vivid of imagination, by the aid of which two qualities she constructed for herself a culture—real, in spite of the fact that it was somewhat ill-balanced.

She spent much of her time out of doors, but the road and the gulch saw little of her. Her delight was to strike directly back across the brook, and up the overgrown hill, to the vast pine-clad heights above. There the castellated dikes frowned like mediæval ramparts; the pine needles were soft and slippery and fragrant underfoot; the breeze swept by on swift wings, humming songs of the distant prairie; the little squirrels chattered and the big squirrels barked; the sun shone silver clear; and below, far down, the summits of other hills dropped away and away like the tiers of some enormous amphitheatre, until the brown prairie suddenly flowed out from underneath and rose to the level of the eye. It was very far from everything up there. And then one could go through the dikes down into Juniper Gulch, where one would find a whole group of claims and one's friends at work on them.

Molly grew to be an expert in the dip of quartz. She was accustomed to perch on a neighboring dikelet, near a claim, where she could enjoy the breeze, and converse without too much effort. There she looked charming, and bothered the workers a little. All workers like to be bothered a little. It is a wise woman who does not bother them too much. The attention is flattering as long as it is not annoying. When the men were below the surface of the ground,

she shouted down the shaft and insisted on a ride in the bucket. Or she rambled long delicious hours with Peter and the Kid, from whom she learned the philosophy of hindsights and the pregnant possibilities of holes under tree roots. These two adored her beyond all measure. The homely, bristle-whiskered animal was always at her heels; the Kid was ever ready to waste precious cartridges on her behalf.

They did much elaborate stalking after grouse, rabbits, and squirrels. Most of these approaches failed, for the reason that they were too elaborate and too eager. Wild creatures seem to be sensitive to telepathic influences. A stolid Indian, whose fatalism does not permit him to become much excited, can often walk directly up to a flock of ducks, when a white man with a breech-loading gun and a desire for a bag could not sneak within fifty rods. Instance also the well known and uncanny knowledge of the common crow as to your possession of firearms. His proneness to distant flight when you are armed, and his sublime indifference to your approach when you are not, may arise not from a recognition of the instrument, but from a reading of the desire for his slaughter.

Be this as it may, the bagging of game was a rare enough event to throw all three into wild excitement. Usually, a grand rush was made in the direction of the fallen. Peter arrived first, and danced, tip-toed, bristle-backed. Molly and the Kid were not far behind. Then came shouts of proud joy and feminine shrieks at the gore. The story was detailed again and again of just how the shot was made. Peter agonized that he could not talk. Finally the grouse or squirrel was borne proudly down to fierce-moustached Black Jack, the cook, who expostulated and grumbled.

"G' 'way, you two!" he growled. "Git out; don't want you around! Goin' t' bake! Vamoose! Ain't hired t' skin no squirrels or pluck no birds. Cyan't be bothered. G' 'way, you two." Black Jack always talked like this—in short, disconnected sentences.

Then the girl would beg prettily, while the Kid, fully aware in whom dwelt the most effective persuasion, stood by, and Peter snuffed around in the forbidden kitchen. And finally Black Jack would yield, with a vast show of bad grace.

"All right, all right!" he would cry, shaking his great head. "Just this once. Never again, mind you, never again. Cyan't be bothered. Wouldn't do it now, only just t' get rid of that dawg. That's it. Cyan't have no dawg around. Cyan't nohow."

He took the partridge or squirrel, still grumbling.

"Oh, thank you, *dear good* Mr. Black Jack!" cried Molly. "And you'll save me the wings and tail or the skin, won't you?"

At this point Black Jack always exploded violently and bundled them out, taking a neatly avoided kick at Peter. Then he would watch them quite out of sight, after which he would expend the utmost care in the concoction of wonderful stews or potpies.

These clear, sunshiny, healthy days tanned Molly's skin to a golden brown, brightened her eye and her smile, and filled her strong young body with abounding health and vitality. Even her evenings did not in any way cloud her spirits. They were of bad influence, but why should she know that? She was a delicious little animal, keen, shrewd, of good impulses, though her moral nature was quite untrained. She possessed instincts—strong instincts—which seemed arbitrarily

to place a limit beyond which she did not dream of going; but that, she thought, was because she did not care to go. The question of right or wrong, consciously chosen, never entered her calculations. Her only standard was her desire—and, perhaps a little, what Graham would think of her—but she did not bother her head one way or the other. She was happy, and was doing nothing she regretted. That was enough.

And yet the evenings were not good—not good at all. They were bound to exercise a certain deleterious influence.

By habit, Molly spent her time after dark on a corner of the bar at the Little Nugget saloon. There she received attention. The peculiarity of her position lay in the fact that her good comradeship had dissipated constraint. The men talked and drank and gambled about as usual. It must be repeated that the girl was in no sense a romantic "idol of the camp." The miners would have been well enough pleased if she had drunk her whiskey with them as freely as they did with each other. As she did not, they merely put the fact down to personal idiosyncrasy, like Dave Williams' horror of cooked rabbit. Rough men do not demand the finer virtues, and she was treated to the reverse side of this idea. She saw what men call life. She learned the game of faro and how men act who have won or lost at it. She gained a knowledge of the strength of whiskey and what men say who have drunk of it. She heard loose speech; she saw loose conduct. All this is not nice for a young girl.

The men felt especially drawn to her because she smoked paper cigarettes gracefully. About ten o'clock she went to bed.

These few days, between her first triumphant arrival and her establishment in her new cabin, were the most care-free and happy of her stay at Copper Creek. She lived thoughtlessly, conducting herself exactly as she pleased, entertaining no regrets, conscious of no sense of wrongdoing, and therefore of no sense of guilt. Then a little incident stirred into wakefulness that fine-wrought conscience which is an element of so many natures that draw their life from New England.

XX

THE EATING OF THE APPLE

ONE morning Molly found herself awakened very early by the sound of whistling just outside. She opened her eyes to discover Peter, who had occupied one end of the wagon, sitting, head and ears up, listening to the same sound. The whistling was young, tuneless. Finally she peered through the crack in the canvas.

Outside, on the wagon tongue, sat the Kid patiently waiting, his little rifle across his knees, one bare foot digging away at the dust, his lips puckered to cheerful sibilance, his wide gray eyes turning every once in awhile to the canvas cover of the schooner. He discovered Molly looking out. The whistle abruptly stopped.

"Come on out, Molly," said he. "I ben waiting for you a long time."

"My! it's so awful early!" yawned Molly. "What do you want to do?"

"I'm going to take you hunting," confided the Kid. "We perhaps can get a squirrel down the gulch, or perhaps a cotton-tail. Come on, hurry up!"

"Why, I ain't dressed yet," objected Molly.

"Well, dress!" said the Kid impatiently.

By this time she was well awake, and the glorious morning was getting into her lungs. Her eye disappeared, and in a few minutes she emerged fully clothed. The Kid looked her over.

"Y' ain't going that way?" he asked incredulously.

"Course not. You wait till I come back."

She stepped down on the whiffletree, her heavy waving hair falling in masses of curls and crinkles over her shoulders.

"Oh, Lord!" cried the Kid pathetically. In the entrance stood Peter, his head on one side. Molly laughed.

"I thought I'd got rid of *him*," complained the Kid, "and here he is!"

"Never mind," said Molly soothingly, "I can make him stand round. Come here, Peter!"

At the pool of the lower creek Molly knelt, turning back the sleeves from her white arms, loosening the dress from about her round young throat. After a little she leaned back against the mosses and piled the strands of her hair, watching the interested Kid with shining eyes.

"My, but you're purty!" he cried. She nodded to him, laughing.

They took their way down the gulch, walking soberly in the road, while Peter skirmished unrestrained among the possibilities of the thickets at either hand. In the judgment of the Kid, this was too near town for the best hunting. The Kid talked.

"You never been down here, have you?"

"No," replied Molly, "I've always been up in the hills, you know; it's more fun, I think. Do you think we'll find anything down here near the road?"

"Not just yet; but after we get by Bugchaser's—Say, you've never seen Bugchaser, then, have you?"

"No," laughed the girl, "I should think not. What in the world is Bugchaser?"

"It isn't a 'what'; it's a 'him.' He's crazy. He has a 'coon, and a bear, and a bobcat. I'd like to go up an' see 'em, but I'm scairt of him."

"Is he dangerous?" asked Molly.

"Pop says he eats little boys. Hoh! that ain't so, of course. But he's crazy, you know."

"What makes you think so?"

"He chases bugs with a fishnet."

"Oh!" cried Molly comprehendingly, and began to laugh.

The Kid looked at her with offended reproach.

"Well," he remarked finally, "you can do what you want; but you betcher life I'm keepin' away from him!"

His eyes were wide with childish wonder, strangely incongruous in this solemn, lonely little creature with his ways of early maturity and his ridiculous cut-down clothes.

"There, there," laughed Molly soothingly. "I wonder what's up with Peter!"

Peter was barking like a bunch of fire crackers.

"Sounds exciting!" said she. "Maybe it's a squirrel up a tree. Let's see!"

The Kid threw his rifle into the position of a most portentous ready, and the two entered the bushes. Peter was discovered, his hair bristling between his shoulders, jumping eagerly around some object which lay, invisible, on the ground. He snapped with excitement. The Kid ran forward with a shout. Molly picked her skirts up and followed with equal rapidity and considerably more grace. They nearly ran over a large coiled rattlesnake.

The Kid yelled and leaped to one side. Molly

stopped stock-still and uttered a piercing scream, after which she climbed rapidly to the top of a near-by bowlder, where she perched, her skirts daintily raised, her eyes bright with excitement. Peter leaped madly about. The Kid discharged rapid but ineffectual pea bullets at the reptile.

"I imagine you need a little help," said a voice so unexpected that Molly nearly fell from the rock. The Kid gave one look at the newcomer and fled with a howl of terror. "A most peculiar youth," observed Durand reflectively as he advanced. "Most peculiar —seemingly obsessed of an unwarranted terror for my person. Strange! I have never acted in any way brusquely toward him." He picked up a stick, and, advancing without the slightest hesitation, killed the whirring snake with a single blow. "You may now descend," he assured her, turning with exquisite grace to offer his hand.

He led the way out to the road. Peter followed until within sight of the animals chained to the posts, and then he quietly disappeared in search of the Kid. This was not cowardice on Peter's part, but he had long since tested by experiment the futility of challenging barks.

Molly had recognized the newcomer from the Kid's description; and her first glance assured her that her surmise as to his calling had been true. She had been reading the *Life of Wilson*, the naturalist, recently; and so knew of the existence of such men. To her they seemed rather romantic.

"Oh!" cried she on catching sight of the chained animals. "Are they tame? Are they tame enough to pet?"

The old man smiled a little at her enthusiasm. He had been looking her over with pleasure, but without surprise. Michaïl Lafond, his new friend, had mentioned his "daughter"; but never, Durand now thought, in fitting terms. This girl was really beautiful. The little interview became an audience to which Durand brought his exquisite court manners.

"Jacques, the little raccoon, certainly is," he replied to Molly's question, "but the others—I do not know —they are tame enough for me—but a stranger——. We can try, cautiously."

Molly had run forward and fallen on her knees before the 'coon. She was delighted with his grizzled, round body, with his bright eyes, his sharp little nose, the stripes across his back, his bare, black hands, almost human, and above all with the clean, fresh woods-smell that is characteristic of such an animal when not too closely confined. Finding him quite gentle, she took him in her arms. Jacques proceeded at once to investigate busily the recesses and folds of her dress.

"He seeks for sweetmeats," explained the old man, who was looking on.

From Jacques they proceeded to Isabeau, the lynx. Isabeau spat a little and looked askance, but under reproof permitted a dainty pat on the tips of his tasselled ears. Patalon, the great clown bear, was good-natured, but rough. He desired to be rubbed here and there, he wished affectionately to return this young lady's attentions with a mighty hug. He smelt rank of the wild beast. Molly returned soon to little Jacques.

"How did you get them?" she asked, tapping the end of Jacques' nose to see him wrinkle his face.

"It is not difficult. One captures them young, when they are mere cubs; and so, although they never will lose their wild instincts, they become as you see them."

"But the mothers——?"

"Ah, that is the pity," replied the old man simply. "Sometimes it becomes necessary that they die."

Molly looked on him with new wonder, this slayer of bears and wild cats, who nevertheless appeared so gentle, whose eye was so mild. It was indeed a marvellous world. She forgot the Kid and the hunting party, and gave herself up to the pleasure of the moment.

From the pets they wandered to the flowers. These interested Molly exceedingly, for she herself was struggling with the boxes of geraniums. It was fully half an hour later when Molly finally said farewell to her host and continued on down the gulch in the direction taken by her little companion.

The Kid was waiting with all the heart-rending impatience of youth. The precious time before breakfast was slipping away in futility. He had made a sacrifice in taking this girl. Never would he do it again! never! never! And then he saw her coming, and forgot everything except his relief.

"Took you long enough to break away," was his only complaint as he rose to conduct the party.

"Have we got time to hunt now? Ain't it 'most breakfast-time?" inquired Molly dubiously. "Don't you think we'd better let it go for this morning?"

"Lord, no! Come on! For heaven's sake don't let's waste any more time!" cried the Kid with a gusty impatience that surprised his companion. She did not realize the humiliated disappointment that had this

last hour seethed in the little breast. "I s'pose we might 's well get up on the ridge," suggested the Kid, still grumbling.

They turned sharp to the left, through the thicket, where the birds were already hushing their songs, and the early dew was quite dried away. The Kid pushed ahead with almost feverish rapidity. Here and there in the brush Peter scurried, head down, hind legs well drawn together beneath his flanks. He snuffled eagerly into the holes and forms, doing his dramatic best to create some game, if necessary. Every once in awhile his bristly head, all alert, peered, cock-eared, over a bush, searching the hunter's face for directions, and then plunging away suddenly as his own judgment advised. It was most scienceless and unsportsmanlike. The Kid peered eagerly to right and left, holding the muzzle of the little rifle conscientiously at an angle of forty-five degrees, as he had been taught, and vainly striving to avoid dry twigs, although Peter was making enough noise for a circus parade. The girl followed a step or so in the rear. It was breath-taking, this excitement. Every stir of the bushes needed examination, every flutter of wings was a possibility, every plunge of Peter might send a covey whirring into the pine tops, or rouse a squirrel to angry expostulation. As they went on up the side hills, still without result, but therefore with expectation the more sharpened, and as Molly's cheeks became redder and redder under her brown skin and her eyes brighter and brighter, and as she bit her under lip more and more, and as the straight level line of her brows grew straighter and straighter with the concentration of her thoughts, it is to be doubted if the most enthusiastic

lover of scenery could have torn his eyes from the pretty picture even for the sake of the magnificent sweep of country below. So at least thought Cheyenne Harry, on his way across the ridge to his claim.

He surveyed the eager three with some slight amusement.

"Hullo!" he called suddenly.

The boy and girl started.

"Hullo!" answered Molly after a moment, when her intent hunting expression had quite fled before her cheerful look of recognition. "That you?"

The Kid too paused, but evidently under protest, and with the idea of moving on again at the earliest polite moment.

"How's hunting?" inquired Harry facetiously. "Killed all the game down below there?"

"All we've seen," replied Molly promptly; "and the hunting's very good." She put ever so slight a stress on the word "hunting." "We're going over the ridge now. Want to come along and help carry the game?"

Harry looked speculatively at the Kid, who was standing first on one bare foot, then on the other. "Naw, guess not," he replied. The Kid brightened at once. "I'm going over to the Gold King for a while. You'd better come along with me."

"Haven't had any breakfast," objected Molly.

"Oh, that's nothing. Neither have I. I'm just out to look around. Come ahead."

Molly did not care a snap of her fingers about the Gold King claim, except that it belonged to Cheyenne Harry; and, owing to the rarity of that individual's visits to his property, she had never seen it. Besides

this, she had been a good deal the last few days with Graham. That young man had been interesting her greatly with a most condensed and popularized account of the nebular theory, which seemed to Molly very picturesque and intellectual. She was much taken with the idea of thus improving herself and she gave herself great credit for the effort, but it was so far above the usual plane of her intellectual workings that she had to stand on tiptoe to reach it. The evening before, she had gone to bed keyed up to wonderful resolves. To-day the pendulum had begun ever so slowly to swing back. All the influences of out-door life had drawn her to the earth; the clear freshness of the early morning, the rank smell of the wild beast, the incipient hero-worship in her admiration of the old man's supposed prowess as a slayer of bears, the actual physical contact with the slapping clinging brush through which she had passed. She breathed deep of the crisp air. She broadened her chest, and stretched her muscles, and drank the soft caressing sun warmth. She felt she would like to get down near the grass, to breathe its earthly smell, to kiss it. It was the gladness of just living.

And to her in a subtle manner Cheyenne Harry symbolized these things, just as Graham symbolized that elusive intangible humiliating power of the intellect. He was strong and bold and breezy of manner, and elemental of thought, and primitive in his passions and the manner of their expression. He appealed to that spirit in her which craved the brusque conqueror.

So for the moment the idea of a scramble with him over these rough dike-strewn ridges seemed to

her the one idea in perfect tune with the wild Western quality of the newborn day. And therefore, to the consternation of the waiting Kid, she replied—

"Why, yes. I think it would be good fun, though I don't believe there *is* any Gold King claim. I believe it's just an excuse for your loafing around, for you certainly never spent much time on it."

"It's the finest thing ever," Harry assured her with a laugh. "I'll show you."

The Kid stood stock-still in consternation.

"Oh!" cried he, when he could get his voice, "and how about our hunt?"

"You come along with us," invited Cheyenne Harry good-naturedly. "It's good hunting all the way."

But the Kid knew better. This heedless climbing and loud talking would be quite different from the careful attention necessary for the destruction of the wily "chicken" or experienced squirrel. He looked very sad.

"Yes, come on," urged Molly; "we'll get something over in 'Teepee.'"

The Kid shook his head, unable to trust himself to speak. Cheyenne Harry turned away a little impatiently.

"I'm sorry," continued Molly with hesitation. "I think you'd like it. But we've had quite a hunt already, haven't we? And we can go another time."

She joined Cheyenne Harry. Peter stood looking first at the Kid, then at the two retreating forms. He was plainly undecided. Molly's gingham dress fluttered for the last time before she turned the corner of a bowlder. Peter suddenly made up his worried mind. The Kid was left alone.

He sat down on a rock, and rested his chin in his hands, and looked away across the valley to the peak of Tom Custer. A tiny white cloud was sailing down the wind. He watched it until, swirling, it dissolved into the currents of air. Far back in the forest of pines a little breeze rustled, faint as a whisper: then it crept nearer, ever waxing in strength, until, with a murmur as of a throng of people, it passed overhead, and vanished with a last sigh in the distance. The Kid listened attentively to the birth and death of the voice. A squirrel directly above him broke into a rattling torrent of chattering rage. The Kid sat, his chin in his hands, looking out over the valley with unseeing eyes, his little rifle resting idly against his knee. The moments passed by, one after the other, distinct, like the ticks of a great clock.

A soft muzzle nosed its way gently between his wrists. He looked down. Peter's homely, gray-whiskered face with the pathetic eyes looked up into his own. The Kid flung both arms about the dog's coarse-furred neck, and burst into a passion of tears.

From the top of the ridge, where she had paused a moment to take breath, Molly saw the whole of this little scene. She suddenly felt very irritated.

That Kid was certainly the most unreasonable of children! Why, she spent three-quarters of her time doing nothing but amuse him. She had got up cheerfully at an unearthly hour, walked several miles without breakfast, followed him uncomplaining through a lot of damp grass and underbrush, and now, because she wouldn't spend the rest of the day with him, he sulked. Forsooth, was she to give up all her friends, her amusements, for the sake of that boy? Molly was

most impatient—with the Kid—and she became so preoccupied in pitying herself that she hardly answered Cheyenne Harry's remarks, and was a very poor companion. She deceived herself perfectly; yet in the background of her consciousness was something she did not recognize—something uncomfortable. It was an uneasiness, a heaviness, a slight feeling of guilt for something which she could not specify, quite indefinable, and therefore the more annoying. It made her feel like shaking her shoulders. There seemed no valid reason why she should not be as light-hearted as she had been a few minutes ago, for her reason saw nothing in her conduct to regret. And yet she was uneasy, as though she had done something wrong and was on the point of being found out. She could not understand it, but it was very real, and, because she could see no reason for it, it made her angry, with a sense of injustice.

It was the first manifestation of another phase of heredity—the New England conscience.

XXI

LAFOND MAKES A FRIEND

MICHAIL LAFOND made much less of a stir in the life of the camp than had his ward. He fitted in quietly.

Behind the Little Nugget was a room and a shed. Lafond took possession of the room, and relegated Frosty to the shed. His position as proprietor of the saloon sufficiently explained his idleness, if anybody's idleness ever needed explanation in a mining camp. He seemed to do nothing, merely because he was to be seen almost any hour of the day either smoking contemplative pipes near his place or Bill Martin's, or wandering with every appearance of leisure from claim to claim in the Hills, or disappearing in the direction of Durand's cabin in the lower gulch. That was a mistake. He really did a great deal.

For instance, he made himself agreeable in a cool, drawling fashion to anybody who cared to talk to him. He kept his eyes wide open, no matter where he went. He puffed as many speculations into his brain as he did smoke-clouds into the air. That was not much perhaps; yet, by the time the Chicago men came to Copper Creek, the half-breed knew just about everybody's business in that camp. The student of character never needs to ask blunt questions.

He soon discovered that his first surmise as to Billy's peculiarities was correct. The man was above all things spectacular. He liked to fill the stage. If La-

fond could strip him of his property—the Great Snake —his prestige as promoter of the camp would be gone. Black Mike could imagine nothing more galling to one of Knapp's temperament.

He soon discovered that it would be no easy matter to do this, however. He had felt sure that he would have no difficulty in taking advantage of the proverbial carelessness of Westerners in general, and Billy Knapp in particular, as to some of the finer points of mining law. There are many technicalities to be observed before a claim belongs indubitably and for all time to the man who occupies it. A " discovery " of certain specification must be made; the measurements and stakes must conform to definite regulations; the development work must be carried on and reported according to the letter of the law; and so in a dozen other trivialities which the miner is like to honor only in the most general fashion. But Billy's requirements were all fulfilled. The claims were undoubtedly his in the fullest sense of the word. At present he could not be deprived of them legally; and as it was no part of Lafond's scheme to allow Billy even the smallest comfort of self-pity when his humiliation came, he did not care even to consider the possibilities of chicanery.

The only glimmer of light he could discern lay in the chance that something might offer at the time of the transference of the property from Billy to the Eastern capitalists. This was the inspiration that had occurred to him in Durand's cabin. He had come to know Billy's sanguine temperament, his enthusiastic predilection for seeing things rose-hued, and he thought it very possible that the Westerner's representations to the capitalists might not bear too search-

ing analysis. Overpraise of property might easily be construed as false representation. Too graphic a description of natural advantages might easily be twisted into an attempt to obtain money under false pretences. A skilful man might be able to discredit Billy so far that the transaction would fall through; and with the failure of this sale, on which the hopes of Billy's companions were built, the promoter's prestige would collapse entirely.

With this sketch of a plan in mind, Lafond applied himself diligently to acquiring a thorough knowledge of the property. That, at least, was not difficult. All he had to do was to go to Billy, and say, "Look here, Knapp, they tell me you've got quite an outfit here. Show me around, won't you?" The Westerner was only too glad of the opportunity to expatiate. He took Lafond down every prospect shaft, over every surface indication. He explained them all minutely. When he had finished, he gave Lafond carefully selected samples from all of the vein fillings. The half-breed told him he wanted them for the purposes of exhibition.

"I got a first class shelf down in the Nugget," he said; "an' I think if we'd jest put a line of samples along it from all the claims, and label 'em, it would be a pretty good 'ad,' don't you?"

Billy did. So the two "sampled" as carefully as for an assay test in the School of Mines at Rapid. About half of the result Lafond exhibited as he had suggested, but the rest he preserved carefully for assay tests of his own.

To be sure, Billy had quite freely shown him his own official tests made at the School of Mines, but

Lafond wanted his information more direct. He could not doubt the accuracy of the reports. But there was always a possibility that the sampling had not been fairly done. He was sure of these other "averages," for he had helped take them. He liked to have things under his own eye, and it was for this reason he had first suggested to Durand that he would like to take lessons in the art of assaying.

At first he had intended to use the old entomologist merely as a convenience, but later, as he became more intimate with the man through his work, he actually began to entertain for him a friendship—his first in over fifteen years. With all men he had been friendly; with none had he been friends. Here he proved a really generous emotion, opening his heart to the soft influences of affection and memory, allowing himself in this one instance an intimacy absolutely without ulterior motive. It all dated from the first day, when a chance question of Durand's touched the springs of the half-breed's youth.

They had adjourned that afternoon to the workshop, where Durand built a charcoal fire in a little furnace and gathered about him a choice assortment of curious implements. After the furnace was well heated, he roasted the ore Lafond had brought with him, heating it through and through, until finally the fumes of sulphur, antimony and arsenic ceased to arise from the chalk-lined iron basin. While the process was going forward Durand explained pleasantly the various steps of the chemical change, interspersing much extraneous information—as, for instance, how Winkler, Tcheffkin and Merrick claim that there is here a loss of gold, which Crookes denies—to all of

which Michaïl Lafond lent but an inattentive ear. He was little interested in theory; but observing the old man's delight in the scientific aspect of the experiment, he feigned corresponding pleasure on his own part.

Then they spread a flux of granulated lead over a crucible, in appropriate juxtaposition with the roasted ore. For nearly two hours it was fused; and as there was nothing to do until the slag of impurities had formed about the bright metal in the centre, the men talked much to each other while waiting.

When the ore was completely fused, Durand seized the result in a pair of forceps. With a small hammer he broke away the great masses of clotted slag. A small bright metal button remained.

"This is the lead, the silver and the gold," explained Durand, "and it is here that we exercise care. All else is as child's play."

He flattened the button on an anvil, and cut it into several pieces. These he placed in the little porous vessels made of compressed bone ash, called cupels, which had been slowly heating in the furnace. The surface of the lead filmed over. In a moment it turned bright. Then fumes began to arise.

Durand's attention became fixed. His hand was constantly at the furnace valve, admitting or excluding more air according as he desired the temperature to rise or fall.

"It is this which is difficult," he explained from the corner of his mouth. "If the heat is too great, some precious metal escapes with the lead. If the heat is too little, the lead is not all driven away."

Lafond was attentive enough to this. He desired above all the practical knowledge.

"Observe the fumes," said Durand; "that is the true test. When they whirl above the molten metal, then is everything well. When the fumes do creep slowly like the mist on a stream, then the heat is not sufficient. If, on the other hand, they do rise straight upward, then it is necessary to reduce the heat at once."

After a time the remaining impurities, under Durand's skilful manipulation, were absorbed by the cupels. The little vessels were drawn from the furnace and placed to one side to cool. A small yellow button was finally detached with pincers.

"That then is the gold!" cried Lafond.

"And silver," corrected Durand gently. He weighed the button with great care. Then with nitric acid he ate out the silver. The result was weighed. The assay was finished. By comparing the weights of the original ore, the cupelled button and the final product, statistics were obtained.

The men drew a long sigh of relief now that the task was quite finished.

"It is hard work," observed Durand.

"It is very good of you to take so much trouble for me," replied Lafond, for the sake of politeness.

"I like you," explained the old man simply, "because you speak French and because there is something in your face that shows that you too have been wronged, and that perhaps, like myself, in your youth you have been light-hearted and were loved by maid and man with the love that is given the reckless—and foolish," he concluded with a little bitterness.

Inexplicably this appealed to Lafond, so that he almost wept with the sheer joy of it.

"It is true, and you are my brother to have seen it

thus," he cried, lapsing unconsciously into the idiom of the Sioux.

They washed their hands and went into the other cabin, where they sat in the chairs made of barrels, and Lafond talked, talked, talked, until the dusk of twilight descended upon them and stole away even the white butterfly cases.

He spoke swiftly and animatedly and with much gesticulation. Men will tell you to-day that his speech was deliberate, scant, reserved.

It was all of his youth. He described with abandon and fire the tall pines, the still darkling river running beneath the cedars and birches; the cabins, antler crowned, and the little gardens of their dooryard. He related tenderly the life of those old days—the dance in winter to the music of a single fiddle, and the snow shoe journey homeward under the white stars, with mayhap a kiss upon a rosy cheek and a slap from a mittened hand at the end of it; the wild exhilarating dangers of log running in the spring; the canoe journey, the camping, the fishing, through all that watered north country of the fir-girdled lakes and trout-haunted streams in summer; the calling of the moose under the round harvest moon, the stalking of the white-tailed deer, the corn frolics whereat were more of the full-blossomed low-voiced chatterers not unwilling to be wooed under that same great moon, through whose shower of silver light the bull moose called to his mate, also not unwilling. These things the half-breed told in that marvellous musical voice which, with his expressive eyes, was now his greatest charm. He told also more personally of his own youth. There had been a time when Michaïl Lafond had been

straight and clear-eyed and handsome. At the dances and the corn frolics the fairest of the maidens was not so very coy to him. In the log running Michaïl Lafond was the man always called upon to skim over the bobbing logs under the very imminence of the jam; his was the peavy that moved the bit of timber which locked the whole; his the merry laugh as he had lightly escaped the plunging foaming death. On and still on the voice rolled, until suddenly the room was silent and dark, and the man in the corner had arisen abruptly and gone out, and the white-haired naturalist was left alone, one hand on each arm of his chair, looking straight before him, beyond the cabin walls, beyond the years.

Next day Lafond came again, and the next and the next. The assays were all finished and tabulated. Still he continued to come, as usual, each afternoon, for an hour or so at least. Durand did not smoke himself, but he kept a pipe and a package of tobacco always on the table for his visitor. They clasped each other's hands with fervor when they met and parted. They called each other "mon vieux." And, what is more, they could sit quite silent for hours without embarrassing each other in the least.

The men in the camp noticed this intimacy and commented on it.

"Clar case of millennium," said Bill Martin, "Lion an' th' lamb. Ain't no other way to explain it, fer what good Mike ever gets out of that nutty old Bugchaser is beyond me!"

Not that anyone cared. Everybody was at this moment speculating earnestly on all possible results, good, bad, or indifferent, of the pending visit of the

Chicago tenderfeet. Although, strictly speaking, their decision had only to do with the Great Snake, it was well understood that it fixed also the value of every other piece of property within a circumference of fifty miles. Little did those three tenderfeet realize, as they dutifully changed cars at Grand Island, Edgemont, and other way stations, how much their holiday jaunt, as it was to them, meant to a whole community of reasonably hard-working men.

Lafond was the most interested of all, because, to his disgust, the assays had been good, so good that the " false pretence " scheme would have to be given up. He found himself, as usual, facing a situation with not much more than luck to depend on. But he always had good luck.

XXII

IN WHICH THE TENDERFEET CONDUCT A SHOOTING MATCH AND GLORIFY PETER

THE most important event in the history of Copper Creek was indeed at hand. The long-awaited Easterners were to arrive that very day to look over the property. Billy Knapp had already driven to Rapid to meet them, and their coming was momentarily expected.

The camp had discussed long and heatedly the method of their reception. Billy Knapp, and with him a strong contingent, advocated best clothes, an imported brass band, and a generally festal appearance of evergreens and bunting. But this, Moroney, Lafond and Graham decidedly opposed.

"The way to make men give you things," said the last, "is to pretend you don't want them."

But it was Moroney's eloquence that carried the day. In fervid rhetoric he pointed out that men were more apt to join an already prosperous community than to furnish prosperity to one sadly in need of it. He also pointed out many other things, including the Battle of Bunker Hill and the Bird of Freedom. But that was what he meant.

So when Billy and the buckboard drove dashingly up to Bill Martin's stoop, the white road was to all intents and purposes deserted—unnaturally so, for not

a living thing was to be seen from one end of it to the other.

"Look's if your town was dead," remarked one of the Easterners, with a laugh.

"Oh no!" reassured Billy, seized with a sudden anxiety lest the thing had been overdone. "But the boys is all off in th' Hills workin'."

As a matter of fact the boys were doing nothing of the kind. They were behind the cracks of doors and the darkness of windows, watching eagerly every move of the disembarkation, on which they whispered excited comments. Bill Martin was there outside, of course; Lafond sauntered over from the Little Nugget; the gambler sat chair tilted, blowing cigarette rings toward Ragged Top, never even turning his head to see the arrivals, imperturbable, indifferent as ever; Graham and Moroney were on hand by especial request; and of course no one could keep Peter and the Kid away. The men in the cabins were satisfied with their representatives. They need not worry about Graham and Moroney anyway.

The first of the newcomers rolled out over the wheel, stood up on two fat legs, and shook himself in a manner which proclaimed to the dullest that his round face did not belie his good humor. He at once looked about him and laughed. The second was seen to be a tall spare man, gray-faced, deep-lined, but with the wrinkles of laughter about his eyes. He wore a long linen duster and was evidently of the sort that seasons its most serious transactions with a dry and facetious humor. The third was short, small, and irrepressible. He looked as though he should be named Frank, as in fact he was. Although all three were dressed for

travelling, they carried with them a solid air of financial responsibility quite foreign to Copper Creek's experience, a certain shrewdness which no new circumstance could ever abash to the extent of forgetting the swiftest means to the main chance. But over this shrewdness now was brushed a film of optimism, the over-abundant hilarity of a business man on a holiday outside his accustomed surroundings, expanding in high spirits, persiflage, and practical jokes. During their stay in Copper Creek this never left them. They were as delighted with the country as children with a new toy, and took it about as seriously.

The concealed onlookers saw the little group stand talking a moment, and then turn into the hotel. Black Jack unloaded from the back of the buckboard several substantial leather-bound valises. Billy drove the horses home and returned on foot. He was pounced upon eagerly. Billy was still glowing with self-induced enthusiasm over Copper Creek.

"It's all right, boys!" he cried exultantly. "They shore has the right idee! They tells me they thinks this is shore the finest kentry they ever see!"

"What to do next?" they inquired anxiously.

"Do? Nothin'! This ain't no circus. When th' grub bell rings, mosey on over as usual, and a'ter feedin' we institutes some sort of a game outside."

When the grub bell rang, the miners filed solemnly into the dining-room, darting covert glances at the three visitors, already seated with their entertainers. Some nodded solemnly. The Easterners were laughing and joking each other in the most childish fashion.

"By Jove, there's a girl; only one I've seen!" cried

the little man named Frank, as Molly came in and took her seat at another table.

"What of it?" asked Stevens, the tall man, with his mouth full of Black Jack's boiled potatoes.

"But she's a pretty girl."

Murphy, the fat jolly one, carefully removed his butter and soda biscuits, of which the visible supply seemed limited, beyond Frank's reach, and ventured a glance.

"She is pretty," he agreed, firmly thwarting the little man's attempt to steal the butter in spite of his precautions.

He turned to Dan Barker and resumed a labored discussion of the country's game and fishing. The tall man took up his conversation with Billy.

"Yes," said he, "I go through that every morning. I find it invaluable. It keeps me as hard as nails. Feel there!"

He doubled his arm, and Billy placed his huge fingers gingerly over the Easterner's biceps. Down the long table the miners and prospectors ate uneasily, with frequent glances toward the noisy strangers, exchanging rare low-voiced comments, and twisting their feet. Between Molly and the man whom the others called Frank there sprang up an incipient flirtation of glances.

After dinner everybody went outside into the open air, where the gathering relaxed its formality and men breathed more freely. Murphy conversed with several on the subject of Colt's forty-fives. He expressed a desire for a shooting match, to which end he borrowed Billy's six-shooter, and handled it so recklessly that everybody wanted to duck.

Finally he planted the muzzle firmly between his fat legs, rested both hands on the butt, and looked about him triumphantly.

"What'll I hit?" he asked.

"God knows!" ejaculated the tall man; "but you can shoot at this." He drew an envelope from his pocket, and turned toward a small board box resting against the stump of a tree. Bill Martin started forward in alarm.

"Hol' on!" cried he, "I got some chickens in that thar coop!"

The tall man turned and wrung his hand in a mock access of gratitude. "Thank you! thank you!" he cried fervently. "To think how near I came to having the blood of those innocent chickens on my head! I shall never cease to feel grateful to you, sir!"

He marched over to the coop and pinned the envelope square in the middle of it.

"There," said he, stepping back with an air of satisfaction. "Now the chickens are perfectly safe!"

The proprietor grinned very doubtfully. Several men laughed, one after the other, as the joke penetrated.

"You go to hell, Steve," said the fat man, bubbling all over.

He raised the long six-shooter with an easy gesture.

"They're just as good as meat!" he asserted confidently as he squinted over the sights. A breathless pause ensued.

"Always cock your pistol before shooting," Frank finally admonished in a soft and didactic voice.

Murphy, red-faced, muttered something about self-cockers and tried again. This time the pause was suc-

ceeded by a deafening report, and the pistol leaped wildly. From the coop burst a single frightened squawk. Murphy beamed.

All crowded about the box, examining for the bullet hole. On the instant, Frank became wildly and triumphantly excited, dancing about the motionless end of an index finger which pointed toward the unscratched coop. The marksman looked nonplussed for a single instant. Then his face cleared.

"It went right in through that!" he claimed arrogantly, pointing the barrel of the revolver toward a small knot hole. The other two men at once gave vent to snorts of derisive contempt. "Prove that it didn't," insisted the fat one. "Just prove that it didn't, and I'll pay up." He tucked his thumbs into the lower pockets of his waistcoat, supporting the revolver pendent on one forefinger, and smiled broadly.

Billy's straightforward mind saw no diplomacy beyond the inexorable logic of the situation. "Thar ought t' be a bullet hole in th' other side of th' coop then," he suggested in a modest voice.

Murphy cast upon him the glance of reproach.

"I give up," he confessed with grieved dignity, and, without awaiting an investigation, turned toward the saloon. "It means drinks," he observed laconically. "All of you!" he added to the crowd.

Near the door Peter fell in with the procession. The tall man seized upon him before even that experienced animal could escape. After an ineffectual lunge or so backward toward his haunches, the homely dog seemed to realize that no harm was intended, and so became quiet. Stevens passed his hands rapidly down Peter's back and haunches, lifted him first off his fore

legs, then off his hind legs, watching carefully the exact position he assumed when he touched the ground again, pushed his gums away from his teeth, and moulded through the fingers the outline of his head.

"It's a genuine Airedale," he asserted with interest. "Who does he belong to, and where did he come from?"

Nobody knew.

"I don't suppose there's another west of the Mississippi," he went on. "It's a peculiar breed, built for scrapping." The men gathered about with a new interest in Peter. "Don't know just what the strain is, but it's bred in the valley of the Aire, in England. The laboring classes there mostly make furniture, and as they work by the piece, they can take all the time off they want. Consequently they're a sporty lot, and go in for cock fighting and racing and badger baiting, but, most of all, dog fighting. They evolved this strain from something or other. A good Airedale can lick anything except a Great Dane, and he falls down there only because the Dane's too big for him."

"I know of a bull terrier—" began Murphy.

"Your bull wouldn't be ace high. Look at the teeth on him! Get on to the thickness of those bones! Do you think teeth would stick on that slippery bristle coat of his? or, if they did, do you think they would get into that tough loose hide very hard?" He suddenly released Peter and stood up. "Frank," said he, "come here and size up this pup."

Peter shook himself and walked gravely into the arms of the adoring Kid. The Kid had listened open-mouthed to every word of the expert's statement.

But Frank had disappeared. The incipient flirtation had developed.

XXIII

A FOOL FOR LUCK

WHEN it is a question of mining, the most cautious business man loses his head.

It is very difficult to realize the fact that the Western property must not be judged by Eastern standards.

These two short paragraphs state the main reasons why, in the first place, so much capital is sown in waste places; and why, in the second place, Western gold mines have so bad a reputation among investors. Nine out of ten of the legitimate mines of our Western States would be good investments if they could be run as carefully and intelligently as is any wholesale grocery. The expectation of big gambling returns seems to render men careless as to the smaller details.

Why this should be so, it would be difficult to say. Of the truth of the statement there is absolutely no doubt in the world, as anyone who knows the history of the West can testify.

During the three days' duration of their stay, the Easterners looked at facts, incomprehensible to the eyes of such as they, through the explanations, honest enough in intention, of Billy Knapp. He led them, perspiring but pleased, from prospect to prospect, from shaft to shaft, from hill to hill. He showed them leads, fissure veins, red quartz, white quartz, water supplies, timberings, hanging walls, country rock, pan tests, and he talked about it all with that easy fluency

of eloquence, that flattering assumption of the other man's sophistication, which is so peculiarly a talent—nay, a genius—of the Westerner.

Some trades there are for which all men imagine themselves qualified without especial training—such as horse buying, writing stories, judging pictures, and mining. This is a little strange when one reflects that other things, such as painting, skating, keeping accounts, or making a horseshoe, while not a whit more difficult, are acknowledged to require a certain amount of technical education and practice. Perhaps it is because the initial concept is so simple; as, in this case, the digging of ore from the ground, and the reduction of it. Details come, not from observation, but from actual experience. Anybody, on the other hand, can see, without understanding, the complexity of double-entry bookkeeping.

On the afternoon of the third day, the Easterners, Billy Knapp, and Michaïl Lafond gathered formally to talk it over. The latter contrived to be included because he was a man of experience. After some little preliminary discussion, in which the Easterners showed by their airy familiarity with the topic just how much of the local color had soaked in, Stevens rapped on the table.

"Although this is not strictly a business meeting," he began, "perhaps we can get at what we want better by putting some little formality into its discussions. The question before us is this: Mr. Knapp here possesses certain property which he wishes to dispose of. We have been over it thoroughly in the last few days, we have examined the figures relating to its assays and the gross value of the claims. They have been

satisfactory. We have next, as it seems to me, to figure on the probable working expense, in order that we may, with some intelligence, estimate the margin of profit." He sorted over some papers on the table before him. "Let us take up the Great Snake lode first. What, in your idea, would be necessary for its development?"

"Wall," began Billy, rising formally. "They is practically two leads on th' Great Snake; an' if you-all decides to work 'em both, you'd want a shaft on each. A plain-timbered shaft costs you yere about twenty to twenty-five dollars a foot. Then you needs cross-cuts, and drif's at about five or ten a foot besides—that includes everythin'—men, tools, powder. Then yore pump an' hoist is worth about two or three thousan', includin' minin' expenses for two months. That's all th' actual expense connected with th' Great Snake itself; but of course you has to have yore stamp mill and washer for all the group of claims. A good stamp mill costs you ten thousan' dollars, but it's good forever."

"How much shaft and tunnel would you have to sink before getting to a paying basis?" asked Frank briefly.

"That would depen'. You wants to get to water level, of course, afore yore shore; but it might pay right squar' from th' surface. Count on a hunderd foot."

"And when you get to pay level, what capacity a day would you have?"

Billy laughed. "That depen's too. You can put on more or less men. Call her from fifteen to twenty ton a day."

They bent their heads together over the figures. After a little Stevens read the following tabulation:—

2 shafts of 100 feet each @ 20.00	$4,000.00
Cross-cuts and drifts, say	1,200.00
Pump and hoist	2,000.00
1-10 of the cost of mill (there were ten claims)	1,000.00
Initial expense	$8,200.00

"That thar figger," observed Billy, "brings her right up to date without no squealin' whatever. Yere you figgers on taking good hard rock out of four hunderd foot of tunnel an' shaft. Lots of that is pay quartz. You got to figger that you gets some return out of it all. They's a good many ton of ore in four hundred foot of shaft!"

"That is true," said Murphy. "There won't be eight thousand outlay without any return."

"Yore dead right!" agreed Billy.

"Let that go for now," interrupted Stevens. "We can call that 'velvet.' Now what we want to know is, what will be the working expense of converting the ore into gold when the initial expense is over?"

"Call her about five dollars," replied Billy promptly.

Stevens consulted the assay table. "The ore on the Great Snake as shown by samples taken from various spots in the prospect shaft averages $8.55," said he. He figured for a moment. "Allow $3.00 a ton profit at twenty tons a day, it would take only a little over four months to catch the initial expense."

"Of course there's your running expenses of a camp," suggested Frank.

"Oh yes, but look at the margin to cover them."

They went on to the next, and the next, until the ten claims were all figured over. Not all showed as alluring a prospect as the Great Snake, for that was admittedly the banner claim of the group, but all yielded a good margin of profit. It was simple as a proposition in algebra. Assay value *minus* cost of production *equals* profits. There was no unknown quantity in sight. Lafond alone saw one, and he held his peace.

One more item the Easterners had to include, and this, falling within their business habits, and out of Billy's, they arranged to their own satisfaction. It was Billy's price for his claims.

"Now what are your ideas on the subject, Mr. Knapp?" asked Stevens briskly.

Billy hesitated. "Mebbe it's funny," he confessed; "but I hadn't settled on a price. I know you gentlemen 'll do what is right. But I would like to stay with her a bit."

"Stay with her?"

"Yes," explained Billy, embarrassed. "Keep a holt; sort to be interested myself, you know." There spoke Billy's vanity.

The three talked together low-voiced for a moment. They had conceived a vast respect for Billy's capacity in the West, however unsophisticated he might appear in the East; and they had long before talked out in anticipation just this point. Stevens voiced their decision.

"We have decided, Mr. Knapp," he began, "to ask you to be our superintendent, provided of course the company is formed. We feel sure that your best ef-

forts will be expended in our behalf, because your interests will be ours." Then he went on briefly to flatter Billy exceedingly, until that individual was ready to weep with joy. "Our proposition is this," he concluded. "We intend to form a stock company of two hundred thousand shares at one dollar a share, non-assessable. Of this amount a majority will be held by the promoters of the company, some other smaller amount will remain in the treasury, and, say, fifty thousand will be floated on the market. Our offer is, to make you superintendent at a nominal salary of five thousand, and to give you in addition thirty thousand promoter's shares as your price of the claims. These shares you may either sell or keep. Thus you may either take a certain sum of money, or you may pool your interests with ours, confident that every good showing made by you as superintendent will increase the value of your holding as participator in the enterprise. In other words it gives you a personal interest in your work here. What do you say?"

"Heads I win, tails you lose," said Lafond over in the corner, but he said it under his breath.

To Billy it was all gorgeous. He saw only that he was offered thirty thousand dollars and five thousand a year, in addition to keeping the position of prominence he coveted. To him the paper dollar shares looked as good as paper dollar bills.

"What do I say?" he cried, "I say 'put her thar,' and thank you. Let's go have a drink!"

So the meeting adjourned, wonderfully inspirited, especially Michaïl Lafond, for at last he saw a chance.

As he looked up at the stars that night before turn-

ing in, he made a quaint little sign on high. It was the Indian gesture of worship. "Lafond," he purred to himself, "you are a fool for luck. Rippling Water used to say you were born under a lucky star, and by the Turtle, I believe she was right!"

For though the Easterners thought they had done well in paying Billy with a paper futurity, Lafond saw two sides to the question. The meeting had been conducted, apparently, in the most business-like and painstaking manner, yet it was to be noted that the fundamental facts, the facts on whose accuracy depended the whole value of the subsequent figuring, were accepted on Billy's mere say-so, without an attempt at outside verification. Billy was honest, but he was superficial. His temperament did not force him to search out the little details. Michaïl Lafond was in the habit of searching them out very thoroughly.

He saw that one claim, because of its peculiar situation, would require an ore bin of equally peculiar construction; that it might perhaps be necessary to flume water to another; that a third, though its surface showing was good, gave indications of being nothing but a blow-out; that though the assay of a certain ore was high, the actual working value might be low, because of the refractory character of the rock. In regard to mere externals of camp-building, his experience taught him that the Easterners' estimate would turn out to be superficial. His view from the inside showed him that every last article of equipment for the buildings, and every pound of machinery, would have to be brought in on mules; that men might not always be easy to get in a new country; that hay for horses came from a distant prairie, at prices that corresponded to the dis-

tance; that the enthusiastic promoter is rarely or never the careful, painstaking superintendent. And so with a hundred other items, which the Easterners had entirely overlooked. It is marvellous that they should have done so. Translate gold into button hooks, the Hills into a factory, Billy Knapp into an impecunious small proprietor anxious to sell, and not one of the three would have gone into the affair so blindly. But it is true. And more, the history of this operation at Copper Creek is the faithful history of a myriad of exactly similar enterprises in the West. Ask your broker friend, or anyone in a position to watch the floating of schemes on Change; he will tell you.

Having settled the business of the trip, the Easterners spent a few ridiculously juvenile days in pleasure. Billy worked himself nearly blind to get them a shot at deer, but without success. They visited Custer. On their way back to the railroad, they took in the Pine Ridge Reservation, where they saw five thousand Sioux, and bought beaded moccasins and short ill-made arrows. Finally they piled on the Pullman, vastly pleased with their sunburn, and a little inclined to swagger in the presence of these clean-shaven, quietly civilized travellers who had not just left the exciting dangers of a pioneer country.

Billy accompanied them. His presence was necessary in Chicago where the new company was to be "floated" and its final organization brought about.

None of the results of the visit were as yet known officially, but of course a well verified rumor had got about that the Easterners were really going to "take hold" and every man in camp was at the hotel door to bid the visitors farewell. Michaïl Lafond was the

last man at the hub of the wheel before the horses started.

"I am glad you came," said he, holding Stevens' hand while he spoke, "and I am glad you are going to invest here. It will help us all, and I sincerely hope it will help you."

Stevens looked at him suddenly, as if to discover whether the lack of confidence in the words was reflected in the man's face. Apparently satisfied, he replied easily, "Course it will."

"Always figure on the safe side," suggested Lafond.

"You're dead right there," responded the other, "and that is just what we've done. We've put down that fifty thousand as dead clear outlay for a starter, without any offsets by way of return, and surely some of that ore will pay something before we get down two hundred feet. Oh, we're all right on that. You'll see us booming before spring!"

Lafond watched the wagon out of sight with a smile in his inscrutable eyes. Then he went down to spend his afternoon with Durand, humming the remnants of a little Canadian *chanson*.

"A fool for luck," he repeated to himself; "a regular fool for luck, Lafond. All you have to do is to sit right still, and it comes to you without the effort on your part."

Between him and his object there now intervened but fifty thousand dollars. And fifty thousand dollars was not an unlimited sum of money.

XXIV

BILLY STARTS IN ON HIS FIFTY THOUSAND

BILLY was gone almost a month.

During that interim Lafond had absolutely nothing to do but wait, for his affairs, both domestic and foreign, were doing well.

"A fool for luck, a fool for luck," he got into the habit of saying to himself, but with somewhat of a congratulatory ring to it, as though he were a little inclined to attribute fortune's favors to that lady's appreciation of his shrewdness. If luck had not favored him, he would have had to accomplish the same results himself. It was a labor-saving device. Nevertheless, as time went on, the strong underlying mysticism in his nature came to make of this luck of his a fetish of no small power. Lafond went about in a continual state of elation. Things were coming his way. Nothing could stop them. They were foreordained. All he had to do was to stay awake so as to take advantage of the circumstances which chance so nicely arranged for him. He had such confidence in the fortuitous moment that he almost ceased to plan ahead, sure that the crisis would bring its own solution.

Fifty thousand dollars stood between Billy's credit and Billy's downfall. Lafond had those fifty thousand dollars to get rid of. The sum was not great, but

neither was it small; and to induce another to spend fifty thousand, in a few months, without any encouraging return, might have seemed, to an ordinary man, a project worthy of careful foresight. Not so Lafond. "A fool for luck," he repeated and awaited Billy's reappearance.

There was Molly's affair with Cheyenne Harry, for instance. What could be better? Lafond had known Mortimer by reputation for a great many years. He was acquainted with the details of the transaction of Mulberry Gulch, and how he and a man named Dutch Pete had swindled all Custer City; he knew too of Harry's various wild escapades in the early Indian skirmishes—on both sides some men said; of his wonderful fortitude in enduring hardship, and his equally wonderful periods of relaxation when back again in the towns; and he knew, best of all from his point of view, Harry's reputation as a man among women. Since this flirtation had lasted so long, to Lafond's mind it must already have passed the limits. The natural sequence would be followed out. In time Cheyenne Harry would have a mistress the more.

In other words, without the slightest trouble or encouragement on his part, the girl would be debauched. Then, through artfully colored vague hints, he would let slip the real facts of her breeding. He was student enough of character to know that she would gnaw her heart out with a passionate remorse, the more intense because of that very innate purity of instinct which now made Harry's task a difficult one. Lafond had absolutely nothing to do but congratulate himself, smoke his pipe, and spend long hours with his friend the entomologist.

After the first flutter over the Easterners' visit had subsided, the camp settled back with wonderful celerity into its accustomed habits. At first it expected Billy's reappearance within a few days. The return was postponed to the end of the week. The end of the week gave Copper Creek to understand that it would have to wait a short time longer. Then came another postponement. And so on, until the little community had taken up its usual prospecting, work o' day, play o' night existence, and the return of Billy was looked upon as an inevitable event, but hazily in the future, not imminent enough immoderately to disturb the current of men's thoughts.

Then all at once Billy was among them, splendid, powerful, energetic, in a hurry, whirling the stagnant waters this way and that, until the spirit of enterprise awoke within them, and a nervous atmosphere of progress replaced the old monotony.

Billy had credited to him fifty thousand dollars; Billy sported a new hat and new clothes; Billy had vast enterprises to accomplish before the ground froze up; Billy drew a salary; Billy possessed an engraved certificate of shares, which he displayed; Billy had a new watch; Billy was looking for men; Billy was deep in complicated plans which required above all things haste, haste, haste; until the narrow little cañon rang with the name of Billy, which was esteemed great in the land.

The new superintendent entered at once into the discharge of his duties. His first care was to sink the shafts mentioned at the first informal meeting in his own shack. There were ten claims, on which eleven shafts were planned. The very evening of his return,

eleven of the handiest prospectors in the camp were summoned to Billy's cabin, where they found awaiting their signatures eleven contracts to sink on the various claims a specific number of feet at a specified price. Next morning they looked the ground over. Next noon they signed. Next afternoon they hired two helpers each, bought powder and fuse, and sharpened drills. The day after, thirty-five men were busily at work on the new company's group of claims. It looked like business.

The same noon, Billy's effects began to come in from the East. He had received a liberal advance on the account of his salary, and the results were various. Among them were new saddles, a new buckboard, a new rifle, silver-mounted harness, and a quantity of clothes of rather loud pattern. But most marvellous was a clean-limbed, deep-chested, slender running horse, accompanied by a sawed-off English groom. Billy spent a good share of the next week with this individual, constructing a corral of small timber in which the new horse might roll about. Each morning the groom led the animal, astonishingly hooded, blanketed, and leather-banded, up and down the hundred yards or so of level road which was all that strip of rugged country offered fit for such delicate hoofs and fine limbs. The beast always progressed teetering a little sideways, nearly dragging the groom from his feet. The camp speculated that Billy had designs on the next great prairie " fair " in the spring, but the truth is the Westerner had little idea of what his designs were. He had been pleased with the horse, and had bought it, without bestowing a thought on expediency. After the novelty of possessing so thoroughbred a

creature had somewhat worn away, he confessed to himself a slight bewilderment as to what to do with it.

Other interests claimed his attention now. The work on the mines themselves no longer needed his care. After the hundred feet of shaft had been quite finished and timbered, he would inspect them in his official capacity. If the job came up to specifications, he would sign its acceptance; if it did not, the contractor would have to remedy the defect. In the meantime he had on hand the building of the camp itself, for which he had already planned largely.

Lafond climbed the gulch and the knoll, after activity had been well under way for about a week. He found Billy paying the freight-bills on several loads of heavy red-painted machinery, while the teamsters spat and swore just outside the little shack, which he now used as an office. Billy was signing slips from his new check book. Until he should have finished, Lafond strolled about examining the grounds.

Around the mouths of the shafts themselves the débris had accumulated astoundingly, showing that the contractors too had been industrious, but Lafond paid little attention to them. He was more interested in the clearing, levelling, trimming and digging which seemed to indicate the undertaking of rather extensive works above ground. Perhaps a dozen men were at work. Some were engaged in "trueing" the four great foundation beams of what was evidently to be a large building. Others squared smaller timbers near at hand. The remainder were measuring and indicating with a shovel the outlines of other and less pretentious structures. In a moment Billy came out ready to dissertate at length.

"That thar is the boardin' house," he explained. "I thought at first I'd only make her big enough for thirty, 'cause that's as big a gang as I starts with; but then I figgers it out, an' it won't be long before I takes on more, so I thinks it jest as well to start where I ends. So she's goin' to accommodate sixty, two-story, you know. Then yere's the cookee's shack. I aims to have th' kitchen separate yere—don't like that Prairie Dog game nohow." (The "Prairie Dog" was the hotel; and the "game" was the inclusion of the kitchen and the dining-room in the same apartment.) "Then yere's to be the office. I uses my old shack for an office now. I aims to have three sleepin'-rooms, an' a dinin'-room and kitchen."

"What for?" asked Lafond, a little puzzled.

"For me."

"For——?"

"I don't aim to eat with the men. And over yander 'll be th' stables; and thar th' blacksmith's shop; and then the powder house is on th' other side of the gulch. The chicken house is beyond th' blacksmith's shop."

"The what?" asked Mike.

"The chicken house."

"Oh," said Mike.

"I ain't got the ground all broke yet," pursued Billy; "but the plans is all ready, and it ain't takin' long when once we git started. The stuff fer th' mill is comin' along slow," he observed, pointing to the red-painted machinery; "but I ain't aimin' to put her up till nex' spring. Can't do much with her till I gets th' shafts sunk."

"No," agreed Lafond.

"But I got th' plans fer that too. Come on in an' I shows them to you."

He led the way into the little shack, and began to rummage in a valise full of papers. Lafond found the place in a litter of confusion. Scattered about in the wildest disorder were clothes, weapons, saddles, harness, knick-knacks and mining tools. Among the latter the half-breed noticed the sections of a pump—an expensive machine used only after a shaft has penetrated below the water level, but which Billy had already purchased. Lying half open among the dusty quartz specimens, empty ink bottles, rusty pens and old pipes, which cumbered the table, Mike perceived a large wooden box.

"What's this?" he asked.

Billy looked up red-faced from his search.

"That?" he replied. "Oh, that's a stamper," and dived back into the valise.

Lafond drew the box toward him. He found it to contain a vast quantity of rubber types of all sizes and styles, figures, ornaments and ornamental rulings. The box itself was perhaps some thirty inches square. It was a most elaborate outfit, whose use is confined almost entirely to large department stores where there is much marking of prices.

Billy now stood upright, having found his roll of plans.

"What did you say this is?" asked Lafond again.

"A stamper."

"What do you do with it?"

"You sticks the types in this rule *this* way." Billy took out the rule and some of the types, fumbled unskilfully with them for a moment, and threw them impatiently down. "Anyway, they goes in; and then that keeps them in a straight line."

"Yes," persisted Lafond, "but what's it for?"

"Why, to stamp things with, of course."

"What things?"

Billy hadn't thought of that.

But his discomfiture was only momentary. He spread the plans out on the rapidly cleared table, and discoursed concerning them. Lafond lent an attentive ear, but said little. Billy's ideas were comprehensive. They included every adjunct of use or expediency which the prospector remembered to have seen in any of the numerous successful camps which had fallen under his observation. In fact, when finished, the external Great Snake would be a composite of the desirable features of many other camps, including the great "Homestake" itself. It was evident that before Billy's mind's eye, the Great Snake was already as prosperous and as well entitled to its graces of mining luxury as any of the older enterprises. After a little appeared a man who had some horses to sell, so Lafond took his leave and retraced his steps to town. Near the foot of the knoll he happened across still further evidence of Billy's wandering activity in the shape of an ivory-handled clasp knife of five-inch blade. Mike remembered that Billy had shown it about in the Little Nugget the evening before as another example of the Easterners' generosity; and he remembered further the Westerner's delighted laugh over the inscription, "William Knapp."

"Don't know myself that way," he had cried. "I clean forgets that 'Billy' does stand for 'William.'"

Lafond's first impulse was to reclimb the knoll for the purpose of returning his find to its owner, but on second thoughts it hardly seemed worth the trouble.

He slipped it into the side pocket of his canvas coat, where, of course, he speedily forgot all about it.

When he reached the Little Nugget, empty at this time of day, he sat down in his chair and laughed aloud, peal on peal, wagging his head and rubbing his eyes. Frosty, happening in, withdrew with celerity, firmly convinced that his master had gone crazy.

"A fool for luck, a fool for luck!" cried Lafond. "Why, the idiot is playing right into my hands!"

XXV

JACK GRAHAM SPEAKS OUT

THE morning when the hunting party had so unhappily terminated on the slope of Tom Custer, proved to be the turning point in Molly's relations with the camp.

The Kid forgave her in two hours, but her troubled conscience would not let her forgive herself. Therefore she was irritated with the Kid. Therefore her old innocent joyful trips into the hills in his company suddenly came to an end. That is good psychology; not good sense.

With the first realization of evil, slight though it was, her moral nature began the inevitable two-sided argument. She was no longer naïve, but responsible. As a consequence her old careless, thoughtless manner of life completely changed. In the beginning she had come full of confidence to subdue a camp. Speedily she had discovered that it was not worth the trouble, and that she infinitely preferred to play out in the open with the winds and sunshine and the diverse influences of nature. Now a subtle, quite unrealized sense of unworthiness, drove her back to a desire for human sympathy, the personal relation. This personal relation took the outward form of an entanglement with Cheyenne Harry, complicated by her intellectual admiration of Graham.

From the first, Cheyenne Harry had possessed for

her a certain fascination which had distinguished him from the rest of the men by whom she was surrounded. It had dated from the evening when he had kissed her. At the time he had been shown his place swiftly and decisively enough, but it was a forceful deed, such as women like, and its impression had remained. Besides this, Molly's spirit was independent; she respected independence in others; and he, with the exception of Graham, was now the only man in camp who was to some slight extent indifferent. He showed frankly enough, with the rest, that he liked her company and her good opinion; and yet he showed, too, that if her presence and regard were not freely offered as he demanded them, he could wait, secure in their ultimate possession.

At first this fascination had been weak and unimportant. Now, however, it rapidly took the ascendancy over everything else. The mere chance that its influence had been the one first to touch the girl's moral nature counted for much; as did, curiously enough, the fact that, in her relations with Cheyenne Harry, Molly always felt a little guilty. She resented her imperceptible retrogression, and the resentment took the reckless form of a desire to go a step further. This was mainly because she did not understand herself. She had done nothing wrong, as she saw it; and yet They had put this heavy uneasy feeling into her heart. Very well! If They, the mysterious unthoughtout They, were bound to make her unhappy without her fault, she would enjoy the sweets as well as the bitter of it!

Harry had such a way of forcing her to act against her conscience.

"But I can't do that!" she would object to some proposition of his. "I'd like to. I think it would be great fun. But you know very well I've promised Dave Kelly to go up with him this afternoon to look at his claim."

"That doesn't matter," replied Harry cavalierly.

"But it *does* matter," she persisted. "I've promised."

"Oh, shake him. Tell him some yarn. *Do* something. It isn't every day I get an afternoon off this way." Though why he did not, it would be difficult to say.

"I know, but I've *promised.*"

"Oh, very well," said Cheyenne Harry, with cold finality, and began to whistle as if the question were quite disposed of. This did not suit Molly at all.

"There isn't anything I can do, is there?" she asked after a moment.

"You know best."

"Oh, dear, I don't *want* you to feel like that."

"Why shouldn't I feel like that?" cried Harry in sudden heat. "Here I look forward to a whole afternoon with you, and I'm thrown down just because of a kid. I suppose you'd rather trot around with him than with me. All right. Go ahead."

He began to whistle again. He never said what the result would be if she did "go ahead," and this very mysterious indifference had its effect. Molly, genuinely distressed, knit her brows, not knowing what to do."

"Now look here!" commanded Harry, after a minute, with great decision; "you go find that Kid, and send him up to Kelly's claim to say you can't come

this afternoon. You can fix it to suit yourself next time you see him," and then he would himself find the Kid and despatch him.

Molly always acquiesced, but with inward misgivings. She must now do her best to conceal from Dave Kelly the real state of affairs; he must not by any chance see her with Harry; he must not hear from outside sources of her afternoon's excursion with that individual. An element of the clandestine had crept into it. The idea oppressed her, for, in spite of her store of spirits and her independent temper, she was not of a combative nature when she felt herself at all in the wrong. The necessity saddened her, brought to her that guilty feeling against which she so sullenly rebelled. She was uneasy during all the afternoon, and yet she was conscious of an added delicious thrill in her relations with Harry—a thrill that first tingled pleasantly through all her veins, then struck her heart numb with vague culpability. In due course, she came to transfer the emotion from the circumstances to the man. She experienced the same thrill, the same numb culpability, at the sight of his figure approaching her on the street.

This tendency was emphasized, perhaps, by the fact that their walks together—projected so suddenly, undertaken with so strong a feeling of blame on her part—consisted always of continual skirmishes as to whether or not Cheyenne Harry should kiss her. The interest of the argument was heightened by the fact that the girl wanted him to do so. This he was never allowed for a moment to suspect—in fact, by all means in her power she gave him to understand quite the contrary—but he could not help feeling subtly the sub-

conscious encouragement, and so grew always the more insistent. She held him off because her instincts had told her the act would cheapen her. Molly always obeyed her instincts. They were strong, insistent, not to be denied. They came to her suddenly with a great conviction of truth, which she never dreamed of questioning. Among other things they taught her that without love each kiss adds to the woman's regard for the man, but takes away from his desire for her.

Cheyenne Harry used all his arts. He tried force only once, for he found it unsatisfactory and productive of most disagreeable results. Diplomacy and argument in themselves, as eclectics, contained much of the joy of debate. The arguments in such cases were always deliciously ingenuous.

"Now, what harm is there in my just putting my arm around you?" he urged.

"There just is, that's all."

"I'll have it around you when we dance."

"That's different; there's people about then."

"It's just a question of people, then?"

"I s'pose so."

"Will you let me put my arm around you to-night in the Little Nugget?"

"Of course not."

"But there's people there," triumphantly. "Now what's the harm? It's different with us. Of course you ought not to let anyone else, but we're different."

They were sitting near together, and all this time the Westerner's arm was moving inch by inch along the rock behind Molly. As he talked he clasped her waist, gingerly, in order not to alarm. She shivered as she became conscious of the touch, and for one

instant gave herself up. Then she sternly ordered Cheyenne Harry to take his distance. The latter tried to temporize by opening an argument. The half-playful struggle always ended in Molly's gaining her point, but the victory was laughing, and so Cheyenne Harry was encouraged to reopen the attack on new grounds.

As one of the inevitable results, the emotion which Molly experienced in at once denying herself and combating Harry was gradually translated into a fascinated sort of passion for him. Then, too, since naturally the interest of these indecisive encounters increased with each, the two came to see each other oftener and oftener, until the habit of companionship was well established. This habit is very real. The approach of the accustomed hour for meeting causes the heart to beat faster, the breath to come quicker, the imagination to kindle; while the foregoing of a single appointment is a dull loss difficult to bear with patience. It counterfeits well many of the symptoms of love, and for a short time is nearly as burning a passion.

Sometimes the attack would be more direct. Cheyenne Harry's stock of sophistry would give out, as well as his stock of patience.

"Oh, come on, Molly," he would cry, "just one! I've been real good, now haven't I? Oh, come on!"

"You've been nothing but a great big brute, Mr. Cheyenne Harry!" she cried in a tone that implied he had not.

Harry advanced a little, holding out his hands, much as one would approach a timid setter dog. She put one finger on her lips, and watched him, bright-eyed. When he was near enough, she boxed his ears, and

twisted her slender young body out of reach, laughing mockingly, and wrinkling her nose at him.

But then when they had returned to camp, and once more she found herself alone, the delicious questions always came up; how far did he intend to go? Did he see through such and such a stratagem? Was he really vexed at such and such a speech, or was he merely feigning? In what manner would he *dare* accost her when next they met? And so another meeting became necessary soon—at once. They saw more and more of each other, to the neglect of many real duties.

For a time the influence of Jack Graham did something to stem the drift of this affair, but that lasted only until he himself fell in love with her.

With him her first emotion had been of eager intellectual awakening; her second, that of piqued curiosity; her third, of reactionary dulness. As time went on she came to pass and repass through those three phases with ever increased rapidity, until at the last their constant reiteration might almost have relegated them to the category of whims. She liked to be with him, because he made her aware of new possibilities in herself. She could not understand him, because his attitude toward her was never that of the lover. She experienced moments of revolt, when she cried out passionately but ineffectually against an influence which would compel her to elevations rarer than the atmosphere of her everyday, easy-going pleasure-taking life. Ineffectually, I say, for something always forced her back.

Not that Graham ever preached. Preaching would have presented something tangible against which to

revolt, something orthodox to be cried down. In fact, reformation of Molly Lafond's manners of mind or body was the farthest from Graham's thought. He merely represented to her a state of being to which she must rise. The rise was slight, but it was real. It meant the difference between thinking in the abstract or in the concrete. It meant that she was compelled to feel that to men like him, or to women like her, this animal existence, with its finer pleasures of riding, climbing, flirting and sitting on bars, while well enough in its way, was after all but a small and incidental part of life. If the girl had been requested to formulate it, she would not have been able to do so. She apprehended it more in its result; which was to make her just a little ashamed of her everyday manner of existence, without, however, furnishing her with a strong enough motive to rise permanently above it. This, in turn, translated itself into a certain impotent mental discomfort.

As long as Jack Graham preserved the personally indifferent standpoint, the mere fact that he caused her momentary disquiet did not antagonize Molly Lafond against him. Rather it added a certain piquancy to their interviews. He threw out his observations on men and manners lazily, with the true philosopher's delight in rolling a good thing under his tongue. None of them possessed an easily fitted personal application. And his utter indifference as to whether she talked or listened, went or tarried, always secretly pleased her. She liked his way of looking at her through half-closed lids, in the manner of one examining a strange variety of tree or fern; the utter lack of enthusiasm in the fashion of his greetings when

she came, or his farewell when she departed; his quite impersonal manner of pointing truths which might only too easily have been given a personal application. And this was the very reason of it, although again she might not have been able to formulate the idea; that although his methods of thought, his mental standpoints, his ways of life constantly accused hers of inertia, carelessness and moral turpiture, nevertheless his personally indifferent attitude toward her relieved them of too direct an application. She enjoyed the advantages of a mental cold shower, with the added satisfaction that no one saw her bedraggled locks.

But when in time the young man went the way of the rest of the camp and began to show a more intimate interest in her, the conditions were quite altered. We may rejoice in anathema against the sins of humanity, in which we may acknowledge a share; we always resent being personally blamed.

Graham indeed went the way of the rest of the camp. His progress from indifference to love he could not have traced himself, although he might with tolerable accuracy have indicated the landmarks—a look, a gesture, a flash of spirit, revealing by a little more the woman whom he finally came to idealize. That her's was a rich nature he had early discovered. That it was not inherently a frivolous or vicious nature, he saw only gradually, and after many days. Then his self-disguise of philosophic indifference fell. He realized fully that he loved her, not for what she did or said, but for herself; and with the knowledge came an acuter consciousness that, whatever her possibilities, her tendency was now to pervert rather than develop them. For the first time he opened his eyes and examined her environment as well as herself.

She spent half of her day alone with Cheyenne Harry. The other half she was restless. The evening she passed in the Little Nugget saloon, where the men, convinced that she was now the mistress of Cheyenne Harry, took even less pains than formerly to restrain the accustomed freedom of their words and actions. Graham viewed her indifference to all this, and her growing absorption by Cheyenne Harry, with some alarm. He conceived that the state of affairs came about more because of a dormant moral nature than because of moral perversity; and as to this he was partly right. But he could not fail to perceive the inevitable trend of it all, no matter what the permitting motive. He would have been less—or more—than human, if he had let it pass without a protest.

At first the protest took the form of action. He tried to persuade the girl to spend the evening in other ways. While the novelty lasted, this was all very well. He epitomized and peptonized his knowledge on all subjects to suit her intellectual digestion. They called it their "lesson time," and he made the mistake of taking it too seriously. He was very much in earnest himself, so he thought she should be so. They talked of nothing but the matter in hand. After a little, there came an evening when she was a trifle tired. The matter in hand did not interest her as much as it should. She leaned the back of her head against her two clasped hands, and sighed.

"I'm stupid to-night," she confessed. "Let's talk. Tell me a story."

Graham was much in love, and so incapable of readjustments. He had thought out carefully several new and interesting things to say.

"I thought you said you were really in earnest about

this," he reproached her. "If you are going to improve yourself, you must work; and work cannot depend on one's mood."

All of which was very true, but Jack Graham could not see that there inheres in truth no imperative demand for its expression.

But when another night came, her enthusiasm was less marked, for she saw no escape. After a time she skipped an evening. Then at last she gave it up altogether.

"I'm afraid I'm not intellectual," she confessed, smiling doubtfully. "I told you I'd be a disappointment. It is all interesting and very improving, but—well, I don't know—it seems to make us both cross. I guess we'd better quit."

Jack Graham seemed to indicate by his manner that he was disappointed. A good deal of his disapproval was because he saw that her renunciation of these "improving" evenings meant not only the loss of the improvement, but her exposure to worse influences; but of course Molly Lafond did not know that. She took the young man's condemnation entirely to herself, and consequently, when in his presence, felt just a little inferior. She concealed the feeling with an extra assumption of flippancy.

Because of these things, as time went on, she came to see more and more of Cheyenne Harry and less and less of Jack Graham. The latter's mere presence made her ashamed of her lack of earnest purpose. He, for his part, viewed with growing uneasiness the augmenting influence of the dashing Westerner; for he knew the man thoroughly, and believed that his attentions meant no good. In that, at least for the present,

he did him a wrong. Cheyenne Harry merely amused himself with a new experience—that of entering into relations of intimacy with a woman intrinsically pure. The other sort was not far to seek, should his fancy turn that way. But to Graham these marked attentions could mean but one thing.

His resolve to speak openly was not carried into effect for a number of days. Finally, quite unexpectedly, he found his chance.

Toward evening, as he was returning from a day's exploitation on his three claims in Teepee, he came across her sitting on a fallen log near the lower ford. The shadows of the hills were lying across the landscape, even out on the brown prairie. A bird or so sang in the thicket. A light wind breathed up the gulch. Altogether it was so peaceful; and the girl sitting there idly, her hands clasped over her knees, gazing abstractedly into the waters of the brook, was so pensive and contemplative and sad, that Graham had to spur his resolution hard to induce it to take the leap. But he succeeded in making himself angry by thinking of Cheyenne Harry.

She saw him coming and shrank vaguely. She felt herself in some subtle way, which she could not define, quite in the wrong. What wrong she could not have told. When, however, she saw that plainly his intention was to speak to her, she smiled at him brilliantly with no trace of embarrassment.

They exchanged the commonplaces of such a meeting.

"Why are you so solemn?" she broke in finally. "You look as if you'd lost your last friend."

He looked at her. "That is the way I feel."

"Oh," said she.

They fell silent. She did not like at all the gloomy fashion of his scrutiny. It made her nervous. She felt creeping on her heart that mysterious heaviness, the weight of something unknowable, which she had lately been at such pains to forget. She did not like it. With an effort, she shook it off and laughed.

"What's the matter?" she cried with forced gayety. "Didn't he sleep well? Don't he like my looks, or the freckle on my nose, or the way I wear my cap?"—she tossed the latter rakishly on her curls, and tilted her head sideways.

"What *is* the matter?" she asked with a sudden return to gravity.

"*You* are the matter," he answered briefly.

"Oh dear!" she cried with petulance; "has it come to that?"

"No, it has not come to that, not what you mean. But it has come to this: that your conduct has made every true friend of yours feel just as I do."

She stared at him a moment, gasping.

"Heavens! you frighten me! What *have* I done? Come over here on this log and tell me about it."

Graham's vehement little speech had vented the more explosive portion of his emotion. Whatever he should say now would be inspired rather by conviction than impulse; and the lover's natural unwillingness deliberately to antagonize his mistress made it exceedingly difficult to continue. He hesitated.

"You *must* tell me now," she commanded; "I insist. Now, what have I done?"

"It isn't so much what you have done," began Graham lamely, "as what you might do. You see

you are very young, and you don't know the world; and so you might walk right into something very wrong without realizing in the least what you are doing, and without meaning to do wrong at all. Everybody owes it to himself to make the best out of himself, and you must know that you have great possibilities. But it isn't that so much. I wish I knew how to tell you exactly. You ought to have a mother. But if you'd only let us advise you, because we know more about it than you——"

The girl had watched him with gleaming eyes. "That doesn't *mean* anything," she interrupted. "What is it, now? Out with it!"

"It's Cheyenne Harry," blurted Graham desperately; "you oughtn't to go around with him so much."

"Now we have it," said the girl with dangerous calm; "I'm not to go around with Harry. Will you tell me why?"

"Well," replied Graham, floundering this side of the main fact; "it isn't a healthy thing for anybody to see any one person to the exclusion of others."

"Yourself, for instance," stabbed the girl wickedly. "Go on."

Graham flushed. "No, it isn't that," he asserted earnestly. "It isn't for the benefit of the others that I speak, but because of the effect on yourself. It isn't *healthy*. You are wasting time that might be very much better employed; you get into an abnormal attitude toward other people; you are laying stress on a *means* to which there is no *end*, and that is abnormal. I don't know that you understand what I mean; it's philosophy," he concluded, smiling in an attempt to end lightly.

"No, I do not understand in the least. All I understand is that you object to my seeing a certain man, without giving any particular reason for your objections."

"It isn't especially elevating for you to sit every evening in a bar room crowded with swearing and drinking men who are not at all of your class," suggested Graham. "The language they use ought to teach you that."

"They are my people," cried Molly with a sudden flash of indignation, "and they are honest and brave and true-hearted. They do not speak as grammatically as you or I; but you have been to college, and I have been blessed with a chance to read. And whatever language they speak, they do not use it to talk of other people behind their backs!" She reflected a moment. "But that isn't the question," she went on, with a touch of her native shrewdness. "I understood you to make a request of me."

Graham had not so understood himself, but he had a request ready, nevertheless. "That you be a little more careful in the way you go about with Mortimer, then," he begged.

"And why?" she asked again.

"Because—because he means to do you harm!" cried Jack Graham, driven to the point at last.

She rose from the log. "Ah, that is what I wanted to hear!" she returned in level tones—"the accusation. You will tell him this to his face?"

Graham paused. His anxiety was a tangle of suspicions born of his knowledge of men, his intuitions, and his fears. Looking at it dispassionately from the outside, what right had he to interfere? Graham was

much in love, brave enough to carry through the inevitable row, and quite willing as far as himself was concerned, to do so; but he could not fail to see that, however the affair came out, it would irretrievably injure the girl's reputation. No one would believe that he would go to such lengths on suspicion of merely future harm. To the camp it would mean his proved knowledge of present facts. So he hesitated.

"You will not, I see," concluded the girl, moving away; "rest easy, I shall say nothing to Harry about it. I don't know what he would do if he heard of it."

She began to walk toward the ford, every motion expressing contempt. She believed she had proved Graham a coward, and this had rehabilitated her self-respect. She was no longer ashamed before him. At the water's brink she turned back.

"And remember this, Mr. Jack Graham!" she cried, her repressed anger suddenly blazing out; "I may be young, and I may not know much of the world, but I know enough to take care of myself without any of *your* help."

She picked her way across the stepping-stones and disappeared, without once looking back.

XXVI

AND HAS TO GO TO WORK

FROM that moment Graham ceased to be an integral factor in the girl's history. His only hold on her imagination had been his moral superiority, and it was now gone. She treated him thenceforth as an admirer whose sincerity deserves the consideration which his insistence makes difficult to give ungrudgingly. He was not discouraged or frowned on. He was forgiven promptly as a child is forgiven. But he was kept always scrupulously to his place. The girl now held the whip hand. After a little, when he became too insistent, she cut him cruelly in punishment and only deigned to smile on him again when, to sue forgiveness, he had quite abandoned his attitude of fault-finding.

As for him, the girl's actions soon became hateful. He saw them all wrong, yet he felt his powerlessness to alter them in even the slightest degree. This aroused so powerful but so impotent a rage that shortly he came to react irritably against everything Molly did whether right or wrong. He instinctively arraigned himself in the opposition. He did not want to do this, and his common sense accused him strongly of unreasonableness, but he could not help it. It was greater than he. No matter what the plan, discussion or even conversation, his morbidly sensitive consciousness of the girl's error impelled him to object.

"Let's go over to Rockerville to-day," she would suggest.

"The horses aren't here."

"But it's no great matter to get them. Let's send the Kid."

"I don't know where the Kid is."

"Well, Frosty then."

"Frosty's busy."

"It wouldn't hurt you any to get them yourself."

"One of the saddles is broken."

"You know very well it's only a cinch ring. It can be fixed in five minutes."

"We'll—— Don't you think it is going to be pretty hot?"

"No, I don't; and if I can stand it, I should think you could."

"And——"

"Heavens and earth! It's harder than climbing trees to get you to do anything. Never mind! *I* don't want to go to Rockerville or anywhere else if it's all that trouble!"

And then Graham would wonder at his stubborn fit. Why shouldn't they have gone to Rockerville? In five minutes he could have got the horses, fixed the saddle. And the day was beautiful. What real reason did he have? He did not know; only he felt an irresistible impulse to object. This was because he loved her, disapproved of her, and was quite powerless over her.

When he was not merely contrary, he was urging strong advice on an unwilling recipient. It was offered in either the pleading or the blustering spirit. If in the former, Molly merely teased him. If in the

latter, she became very angry. It was always on the same subject. The girl was wearied with it.

And yet, if it were any consolation, Jack Graham could have comforted himself with the truth that, next to Cheyenne Harry, he claimed a greater share of her thoughts than any other in camp. His offices were ungrateful, but they had a certain sincerity which prevented their being ignored; and, not forgotten, their acid-like drop of truth ate into that conscience of which she did not yet realize the existence. Her horizon was becoming banked with thunderclouds, looming huge and black and heavy with portent. Graham, as an ideal, had stood for a higher existence. Now, however shrunken his image appeared, the ideal itself remained as something tangible in her collection of moral standards. She acknowledged to herself fiercely that she had fallen from it. She told herself that she did not care.

She was dreadfully alone. Lafond was always kind to her, but she never felt that she knew him. Graham, in spite of his frequent presence, was in reality quite estranged. The Kid and Peter and Kelly and Houston and even old Bill Martin had fallen away from her somehow. She did not know that the reason the older men were less intimate was because she was supposed to be Cheyenne Harry's mistress, and the rule of such cases is "hands off!" And then there was always the stifling formless weight at her heart which she did not understand. She was very unhappy. That with her meant that she was reckless. She threw herself passionately into her affair with Cheyenne Harry as the one tangible human relation left to her in its entirety.

The days followed each other in a succession of

passionate exaltations and dumb despairs. Harry kissed her whenever he pleased now. She had long since got beyond mere coquetry. It meant much to her hereditary instincts so to yield, but she gave herself up to it with the abandon of a lost soul delivering itself to degrading wickedness. For in spite of her life and companions she was intrinsically pure, so pure that even Cheyenne Harry, with all his extraordinary influence, did not somehow care to go too far. He kissed her, and at the first, when the long resistance had enhanced her value, he was persuaded that he loved her —that these interviews meant to him what lovers' meetings mean—and so he responded to her passionate devotion with what seemed to be corresponding ecstasy.

But then after a little insensibly the flood ebbed. In the old days she had amused him with her bright laughter, her gay speech, her mocking superiorities, her little coquetries of manner or mannerism. Now she had thrown these weapons away. Her surrender was complete. Her life had simplified to one phase, that of dewy-eyed pleading adoration. At first it pleased his masculine vanity. After a time it cloyed ever so little; Cheyenne Harry missed the "comic relief" in all these heroics. He would have liked occasionally to have climbed hills; or taken long walks; or even run a short race, say to the bend of the road; or to have had played on him a small practical joke; or experienced some other such indication that man is a laughing animal. The girl seemed capable of enjoying nothing but slow and aimless saunterings. In the beginning he had experienced the nameless ecstasy and thrill inherent in the personal contact of the kiss.

Now he missed something of those qualities. It seemed no longer strange to him to feel her body near his, to watch her wide eyes half-closed, to press his lips against hers, half-parted. It was still delightful above everything in the world, but there had been one thing better—the kiss of yesterday. In a word Cheyenne Harry's experience was beginning dimly to trace the word "satiety."

Not that either he or the girl realized it. To their thinking minds everything was as usual. But their subconsciousness appreciated it, and interpreted it according to its value. Cheyenne Harry, as has been pointed out, turned instinctively toward a desire for lighter phases in their relationship. Molly Lafond clung the more blindly to her passion. Her only excuse to herself for her abandonment of the better ideal was the reality of that passion. When it should go, her self-respect would vanish with it.

Harry found a certain amusement, too, in seeing Graham jumping around the outer circle like corn in a popper. Graham was usually possessed of so much innate dignity. Now his self-abandonment to the essentially undignified attitude of begging for the petty favor of a quarrelless ten minutes or even a little good-humored smile tickled the other's sense of the incongruous and pleased his vanity. To an extent he was held to the girl now by his pride. A man likes to have a rival when perfectly secure himself, especially when the girl tells him what the rival says to her. This may not be honorable in her, but it is very human. So amusing was it that Harry did not get angry over the reports of Graham's repeated warnings against him.

The latter seemed unable to keep off the subject. He

knew that his suspicions only strengthened the girl's obstinate opposition, but he could not help their expression for all that. Sometimes he pleaded, sometimes he threatened, sometimes he assumed the prophet's mantle and foretold all sorts of dire disasters. The girl laughed, or became angry. It would have puzzled Graham to tell which of these moods he preferred: perhaps it would have depended on which of them he was experiencing at the moment.

His saving grace was a sturdy sense of his duty to himself. He felt that sense to be sadly shaken in many ways; but he clung to his work tenaciously, perhaps a little feverishly.

"Nuthin' like a woman to make a man work," observed Bill Martin sagely, "whether she's *fur* him, or *agin'* him."

"How about Billy?" inquired Old Mizzou.

Bill Martin laughed. "Billy? Oh, he's *playin'*," he replied.

XXVII

PROSPERITY

BILLY did not think so, however. He posed to himself as the most industrious man in the territory. He had so much to see to that year, for throughout the mild winter that succeeded he had pushed forward with the greatest rapidity all work on the Great Snake and its sister claims. The log structures, the plans of which he had displayed to Lafond, were completed, so far as the mere erection of them went, within a fortnight. Billy gave a great deal of personal direction to this work; but after all it was simple enough, so he managed to chink in a moment here and there for the completion of certain bargains which came to him. For instance, a man in Spring Creek Valley offered eight draught horses at a marvellously low figure. That made two teams. Billy did not need two teams just then; but of course later, when the mill was up, he would need a great many more than two teams for the purpose of carting ore; and it seemed criminal to let such a bargain go. Then he found he required a man to take care of them. Some days later he came to the conclusion that it would be good economy to buy the ore wagons now instead of waiting until later, for the following ingenious reason: the horses must be fed; hay costs fifteen dollars a ton in the hills and five on the prairie; with wagons the horses could be utilized to haul their own forage from the plains at a net saving of ten dollars a ton on all

consumed. So Billy placed an order for two heavy wagons, and dismissed the matter from his mind until they were delivered. During the interim he sat on top of a ladder and dabbed contentedly at a scroll-work cornice with a small red paint brush.

From that elevation he bought a whim, also a bargain. The man was anxious to sell, and it was a very good whim. To be sure one might have argued that inasmuch as whims are machines for hauling ore from depths which Billy's operations would not attain for a year at least, the purchase was a little premature; but then it is equally certain that all mines own whims, and another opportunity for getting one so cheap might never again present itself.

When the wagons came, he and the man drove fifty miles to Rapid, where they hobnobbed with Tom Sweeny and looked over his establishment. Billy bought his household goods. He also took a fancy to some large brass-bound collar hoods for the horses which he had marked with the company's initials " G. S. M. & M. Co.," also in brass. The return trip was made with difficulty on account of the low-hanging branches of trees. Then Billy spent an ecstatic week distributing things to suit him.

The work in the shafts went steadily forward. Billy was willing to offer a bonus on the contract price for a quick job, so the contractors took on extra men. They averaged almost a foot and a half a day, which is wonderfully good. The work indeed went on so well that Billy saw he would need the mill sooner than he had expected, so he resolved to begin its erection at once. He hired all the available men, but soon found that he would have to seek elsewhere for a gang ade-

quate to such an undertaking. He imported one from Rockerville. As the winter came on, he found it expedient to start the boarding house in order, as he said, "To get those cusses up in the mornin' afore the sun sets." The move necessitated a cook and "cookee," and the weekly purchase of provisions. Since he had the men handy, he argued, there was no reason why he should not finish up the small details and odds and ends of the camp in a respectable manner, and so he made many little extraneous improvements, such as a flag pole and a rockery of pink quartz from the Custer trail. Three or four were always away from the mill, levelling up, clearing out or decorating. From Kansas City he imported some chickens with crested heads and a number of pigeons of ancient lineage. The latter promptly flew back to Kansas City. As the novelty of them had worn off Billy took their loss philosophically. In regard to externals the camp began to wear a very prosperous air.

Copper Creek too was busy. Over forty men were hard at work on the Great Snake itself. Upward of fifty claims were in the course of development near at hand. With the completion of the mill would begin the crushing of ore; with the crushing of ore would begin the camp's commercial output; with that, provided it were satisfactory, would come more capitalists anxious to invest. It behooved the claim owner to have his exhibit of shaft and tunnel ready for the public inspection. When you reflect that three men usually worked on a claim and that Copper Creek's entire population at that date was a little over two hundred and fifty, you can readily see that it was indeed a lively camp. Even those who were not actually engaged in

prospecting operations found their time fully occupied in providing for those who were. Black Jack had an assistant now. Moroney's paper came out as often as once a fortnight and was beginning to be mentioned by the *Deadwood Miner* as "our esteemed contemporary." Bill Martin had been seen sweeping out his own office. The dozen of women and girls who had drifted in with newcomers, scrubbed, cooked, washed and sewed in a struggle to keep even with muddy boots, miners' appetites, and the destructive demands of miners' work. Even Frosty improved his customary mooning slouch.

The men who seemed to enjoy unlimited leisure could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Cheyenne Harry laughed at it all. His one claim was known to be a mere excuse for existence, a symbolic reason for his connection with Copper Creek. Everybody knew really why he stayed. He was supposed to be independently rich, though none claimed any knowledge of how he came to be so. Then there was the gambler, the faro man, who sat on the hotel "porch" all the morning smoking endless cigarettes, his broad straight hat tipped a little sideways, his moustache brushed neatly away to show his white teeth, his fine inscrutable eyes looking cynically from his equally fine clear-cut face, speaking seldom, smiling never, imperturbable, indifferent, cat-like. And there was Durand, but he did not count. And there was Michaïl Lafond.

To be sure the half-breed was building a new dance hall, to which the camp entire looked with anticipatory delight, but that was a matter of four walls and a smooth floor. He needed only to give his orders.

After a perfunctory morning inspection he had the day to himself.

The work at the Great Snake interested him, as it did everybody. He occupied the morning about the works, poking into odd corners, questioning the workmen, making suggestions to Billy. He sent the horse dealer to Billy, and mentioned to the whim man that he might find a purchaser there. He often was enabled in his vaster leisure to perceive the little things that lacked and to point out their necessity to Billy, which individual was of course always duly grateful and hastened at once to remedy the defect. After a more or less lengthened visit the half-breed returned to camp. If it happened still to lack some time until dinner, he called on Moroney in the editorial rooms or exchanged sententious comments with Bill Martin, or chatted with one or the other of the visitors who happened to be in town. After dinner he disappeared until supper. The time was spent with Durand. The assaying was long since finished, but the two men had grown fond of each other's companionship. It was a silent companionship for the most part. Lafond smoked interminably his short black pipe, turned upside down, watching the naturalist setting carefully the delicate wings of a butterfly or arranging in a paper cylinder the skin of a bird, or searching, spectacled, in black volumes of Government reports. Occasionally, when Durand looked up from his absorption, they exchanged a few swift remarks, elided, compressed, telegraphic; for they understood each other so well that the unabridged form of speech was no longer necessary. On fine days they beat the brushy creek bottoms for the *Nitra*, the rare *Papilo* which men sup-

posed to be extinct. And then, after the early darkness of winter fell, they would be seized by strange obsessions of loquacity. Jacques, the raccoon, a ball of fur under the faint red stove, blinked at them shrewdly, wondering what it was all about.

In the evening, of course, Lafond had the Little Nugget to take care of. The saloon had as yet no rivals. The size of the town perhaps warranted another establishment, but Lafond was a monopolist by nature. He treated the men well, with a geniality behind which were unsounded depths of reserve. Therefore they respected him. The space about the iron stove before the bar came to be the Town Hall. Matters of public importance were discussed every evening. Billy there told things he ought not to have told. The atmosphere was expansive, encouraged one to show off. After one had recounted the obvious, one was inclined in the heat of the moment to fall back on the confidential, merely for lack of something else to say. The camp to a man knew the amount of Billy's expenditures, the number of his shafts. It heard extracts from all his letters to and from the East. It was acquainted with all his and the Company's plans. A good many of the cooler heads felt the intrinsic injudiciousness of this; but after all there could be no traitors among them, because in the end the prosperity of every man present depended on Billy's success.

But while the Great Snake was the main topic of conversation, and always remained ultimately the most important, its present interest, as spring drew near, became overshadowed by that of the new dance hall.

The Westerner loves to dance. A street organ sets him shuffling. He will drive twenty miles in a spring-

less wagon and twenty miles back again in the grayness of dawn to stamp his feet to the sound of an accordion. Every camp has its organized dance joint, a sort of hall mark of its genuineness as a camp. Now with the approach of the date for formal opening this long musicless community woke up to its deprivation. All the details of the new establishment were enjoyed in anticipation. It had a planed floor. The boards had been brought by wagon from McGuire's mill at Hermosa. It was to be lighted by real locomotive lanterns of an impressive but meaningless number of candle power. It was to be entirely draped with flags. The musicians were to be imported from Spanish Gulch. Lafond dispensed this and similar information sparingly, in order that it might be made the most of. He promised the " opening ball " for May if possible.

" That depends, of course," he always concluded his statements, short or long.

XXVIII

LAFOND GOES EAST

ABOUT the middle of February Lafond varied the monotony of his daily programme. He ceased to visit the Great Snake camp, on which work was proceeding as rapidly as ever, and took to writing letters. He wrote a great many, and always mailed them himself with Blair, the driver of the stage. He announced one evening in the middle of March that he was about to leave for a short trip.

"I have the round to make," he said resignedly. "There are many places which each year I must visit. I go to Deadwood, Spearfish, Custer, Sheridan, Edgemont, Rapid, Buffalo Gap, many others. I may be gone a month."

"But yore comin' back, ain't you?" asked someone.

"But yes," assured the half-breed. "Have we not the opening of the dance hall?"

So the very next morning he boarded the stage for Rapid. At Rapid he bought a return ticket to Chicago. This was one of the results of the correspondence he had been carrying on for a month past. His first letter had run about as follows:

"Mr. Frederick Stevens, Chicago.

"DEAR SIR—You will perhaps remember me as one of your hosts during your late visit to this camp. If you do, you will remember also that I am interested financially, and so the good of the camp is my good. You will further recollect that I was present at the

meeting held in Knapp's shack for the purpose of settling with him. For that reason I happen to know your plans and expectations. The expectations were that your first investment of fifty thousand dollars would complete the works to a paying basis. I have no means of knowing the exact amount of Knapp's expenditures to now, but they must be considerable, and I feel that my interests and yours require that you know just what the returns are.

"The results you should get with your fifty thousand dollars are, that you should have, on each claim, shafts to below water level with cross-cuts and drifts, a mill set up and ready, a pump and hoist on each shaft, a month's fuel, a month's wages for men with food and expenses and a camp in good working order.

"The shafts are almost done, but they are sunk on contract and are not paid for yet. The mill is half up; there is one pump and two hoists not up yet. That is all that is done. It seemed to me Knapp has not spent his money well, because there is much about camp which he does not need.

"I tell you this because I am interested."

Here Black Mike paused and tapped his teeth thoughtfully with the end of his penholder. Then he smiled cynically to himself and went on—"To speak plainly, I think the waste has gone beyond what you can afford. Only a man living here and knowing mining well could make it pay. I do not ask you to believe this, but see for yourself how you stand, and I may be able to make you an offer."

By return of post Lafond was frantically called upon to explain. He did so. Billy had been wasteful and extravagant. It was not Billy's fault perhaps, but he

was evidently not the man for the place. Lafond had had but a vague idea of how things were going, but lately he had been at more pains to gain an accurate knowledge of affairs. He had found things as above stated. He did not write at all as a friend of the Company, but because he believed he could perhaps make something by taking the property himself. Instinctively the half-breed knew that an insistence on his own selfishness was the surest way of impressing these Easterners with his sincerity. For that reason he demanded his expenses when he was asked to go East for consultation.

The Chicago men were badly frightened. Lafond repeated clearly at greater length what he had told them in his letters. It had been a case of a man unused to the handling of money. He insisted that in actual value there existed not one quarter of the sum Knapp had expended; and he further claimed that affairs were in such shape West that as much more would have to be invested before the mine could be put on a paying basis.

"Then," said he, "you have your cost of production and your camp expenses always. From your profits above them you have to make up what Knapp has spent and what you will have to spend. That takes your close attention and many years. For that I think you will not wish to go ahead; and for that I come to make you an offer that will make it for you not an entire loss. I do not ask that you believe me. Investigate."

"Would you be willing to wait here while we investigate?" asked Murphy.

"Always, for my expenses," replied Lafond calmly.

The Easterners consulted.

"Very well," said Stevens. "Call it that."

Lafond in the little room at his hotel looked at himself closely in the glass.

"A fool for luck! a fool for luck!" he cried at the imaged reflection, repeating his old formula.

Stevens was gone just ten days. Of course he said nothing of Lafond's presence in Chicago. He had merely dropped in to look over the property, as was natural. Most of the men wondered why he had not done so before. He was cordial to Billy, looked over what had been done, asked many questions, listened attentively to all Billy had to say and departed in the most friendly spirit. When he arrived in Chicago, he went directly to his office in the Monadnock Building, where he had already assembled his associates by telegraph.

Stevens was brief, business-like and coldly impartial. In a man of his sort that indicated that he was very angry and chagrined.

"I have the following figures to submit," said he, taking up a paper. "They are accurate, as I consulted with an expert as to the items of future expense before leaving Rapid.

10 horses at 105.00	$1,050.00
10 sets harness at 60.00	600.00
Mill machinery	6,500.00
Pumps, hoists	1,250.00
4 months' wages at 4.00 a day	4,800.00
2½ months' boarding expenses	610.00
Hay, tools, implements	1,165.00
Wagons, household goods	2,560.00
Miscellaneous	2,112.00
Building roads	829.00
	$21,476.00

"That is what has been spent up to date according to Knapp's accounts."

"But hold on!" interjected Murphy; "he has drawn six drafts. That makes thirty thousand. Has he eight thousand in hand? Why did he have to draw the last draft?"

"He doesn't know," replied Stevens grimly. "His bank balance," he declared, consulting the paper again, "is just $1,126.40. He says he doesn't know where the balance is."

"Do you think——?"

"Not at all. He is perfectly honest. That is the way he does things."

"Here," went on Stevens after a moment, "is what remains to be done before we can even start to work. It is an estimate, but it is a close one; for, as I told you, I had assistance in making it out:

Mills, pumps, hoists	$12,000.00
Sheds, ore-dumps, etc.	1,500.00
20 horses and harness	3,200.00
Men, etc.	5,000.00
Wagons and tools	5,000.00
	$26,700.00

That is to bring us up to the efficient working point. Now here are our liabilities:

Miscellaneous bills	$850.00
Contract on 1,100 feet of shaft and tunnel at 20 a foot	22,000.00
	$22,850.00

That is what we owe, gentlemen," concluded Stevens, slapping his papers on the table and looking about

him. "Now if you want to throw good money after bad, you can do so," he continued after a moment; "but this is a limited liability company and I am done. I am strongly in favor of pulling out some way to save our names as promoters of such a fool enterprise, but I think we should pull out. This man Lafond thinks he can do something with the property if he has a fair show, and perhaps we can save something through him. Our fifty thousand is *gone*—and more, after we've paid our debt to those men—and anything we can save out of such a mess seems to me clear gain."

And so with equal haste they scrambled out.

The first inexplicable phenomenon is the sanguine blindness such men show in going into mining; the second is the headlong thoughtlessness with which they draw out. Anything to get back to daylight apparently.

Again the parallel of the button-hook factory. In case of failure these men would have first looked the ground over well for possible retrenchment along the old lines of expenditure: that failing, they would have examined closely for a possible new plan. But in the present case they never even conceived the possibility of any scale of operation different from that grand vision of eleven contiguous mines all going at full blast which Billy's vivid imagination had called into being. Lafond saw it clearly enough. Had he been so minded, he could have set the whole matter right; just as, if he had been so minded, he could have turned the trend of Billy Knapp's extravagance with a little timely advice.

"Gentlemen," he could have said, "has it ever occurred to you to start on a small scale and work up

gradually to a larger? You can mine one shaft on one claim with one cheap five-stamp mill. In that way you could at least pay expenses from the very surface. After a little you can pay more. Then you might open up another claim. That would take time to be sure; but what business does not take time?"

His actual speech was of quite different tenor. When called before the meeting by a special messenger, and asked to name the terms he was willing to offer, he replied quite simply—

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

This was, of course, quite unthinkable. An animated discussion ensued.

"We have spent over twenty thousand dollars," said Stevens, "and we owe twenty-six thousand more. Then the claims are worth something, surely. It would be better to hold the property just as it stands, on the chance of some future sale."

"Of the twenty thousand you have spent," retorted Lafond, "fifteen has been spent uselessly. I mean not that it was all waste, but that if I had been running the mine I could have bought all I would need for five thousand. And as for the twenty-six thousand you owe, what with bonuses for fast work and contracts at a high price, it ought all to have been completed for fifteen thousand. And besides, if it was I who had developed the property, I would not have sunk all these shafts before making the mill to work. I would have my mine to pay before. I am making you the offer of five thousand for the mine and ten thousand for the works."

This argument carried some weight. It availed to induce an acceptance of Lafond's final offer of five

thousand cash, and the assumption of the twenty-six thousand debt. A man in his position and in his business could easily reduce the latter item.

"Of course this is merely informal," explained Stevens. "We have to call a directors' meeting yet to take official action."

"We hold controlling interest," added Murphy, for the purpose of reassuring Lafond.

"I understand," said the latter. "And now another thing. What are you going to do about the camp itself?"

Stevens hesitated. "I suppose we'll shut down and give Knapp his walking papers," he answered at last.

"That is just it. I want that you look out for my interests in that. If you shut down, that gives the camp a bad name, and a bad name is of all things in the West the worst. And you know not that man Knapp. You discharge him. Eh, well? He is angry; he is without law; he is reckless. He is able to do that which he wishes. He can burn the buildings, break the machinery. Who is it that will stop him? No, when Knapp is discharged, it must be that the deeds are in my hands, so that I can protect my property."

All saw the justice of this argument.

"What would you suggest then?" asked the chairman.

"How is it that you intend to discharge him?" returned Lafond.

"What do you mean?"

"What is the formality? Do you just write and tell him he is discharged?"

"Oh! No; we call a directors' meeting, and pass resolutions to that effect, a copy of which we send him.

We will do that at the same time we authorize the sale to you."

Lafond drummed for a moment on the polished table near his hand.

"Eh, well," he announced at last, "let it be like this. When it is that you have had your directors' meeting and have passed your resolutions, then you send your copy to me, and I will give it to Knapp. Thus I will be on the ground to see that he makes no trouble. And at the same time you send the deeds to this man"—he rapidly scribbled an address—"he is a notary public at Rapid. You will have time to look up his reliability. He can hold the deeds until I pay to him the five thousand dollars and sign a contract to take the debt we spoke of. Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite," they agreed.

"How long will it be before you finish your meetings?"

"Ten days. It takes a week's notice for a special meeting."

On the way to South Dakota again Lafond stared out of the windows with unseeing eyes in which lurked laughter. "Ten days," said he to himself, passing the fingers of one hand softly over the palm of the other. His dark bearded face in the twilight lost its outlines against the upholstery of the Pullman. A nervous little bride on her wedding trip to California grasped her husband's arm.

"What is it, dear?" inquired the latter.

"Foolishness," she laughed, a little forcedly. "But see that man's eyes. Aren't they uncanny?"

"Looks a bit like a maniac," admitted the groom, "but it's this queer light. Odd fellow. Looks as if he

might have one of those interesting Western histories you read about."

"A fool for luck! A fool for luck!" Black Mike was repeating to himself. "Ten days! I can fix the date for that dance-hall opening now!"

XXIX

BISMARCK ANNE ARRIVES

AS has been hinted, the outward and visible signs of prosperity had to some extent increased the feminine population of Copper Creek. Molly Lafond had long since lost the distinction of being the only woman in camp. Some of the newcomers were blessed with wives, one or two were favored with daughters. All told, there were perhaps fifteen or twenty of the gentler sex scattered among the new and old log cabins of the valley.

But from them Molly had little to fear in the way of rivalry. The older women were either buxom and decisive, representing the sturdier pioneer race, or dyspeptic and drawling, as typical of the effects of a high altitude on nervous and underfed organizations. The young girls were angular, awkward and shy, especially so when in the presence of Miss Molly's breezy self-possession. They would all make good "filling" at the new dance-house ball, but they would never obtrude into the foreground.

Then Bismarck Anne came to camp. She conceived the idea quite suddenly, late one afternoon, and without so much as a word to anybody she strapped her most becoming ball-gown inside a poncho and rode across from Spanish Gulch on her little pinto pony.

Bismarck Anne was at that time in the heyday of her youth and prosperity. She was of the dark-skinned,

black-haired, black-eyed type, so " common " when it falls just short of attractiveness, but so abundantly vital when, as in the present case, it does not fall short. Bismarck Anne was instinct, charged with life. Into everything she did she threw a verve and abandon that carried the adventure well through with something to spare. And she was afraid of nothing. She denied the possibility of nothing.

About three o'clock of the afternoon she galloped in. A number of men recognized her and ran to help her down from her horse. Everybody knew her by sight or reputation, but few had ever dared attempt her acquaintance, for ordinarily Bismarck Anne chose her coterie from the powerful and wealthy. Now, however, there seemed to be little cause for anxiety on that point. Bismarck Anne had come over for a good time and she was going to have it. If the men who surrounded her on her arrival felt any momentary restraint or trepidation, they were almost immediately set at ease by the warmth of her manner.

It was Old Mizzou, I believe, who steadied her stirrup, and Dave Kelly who helped her from her horse and held her a moment longer than was necessary, and, to his vast astonishment, instead of being slapped was heartily kissed for his temerity. There was a breathless element of unexpectedness in this which appealed to the miners' sense of humor, and they all laughed consumedly and felt good comrades at once. Old Mizzou mentally added another exception to his sweeping rule about " grass widders and school ma'ams." There sprang up a rapid fire of good-humored joking back and forth in which no man was favored, where each had a chance to enter the lists, and in the course of

which each conceived an inner conviction that all he needed to "win out" was a chance unhindered by the crowd. Bismarck Anne stood in the centre of the group, flashing her black eyes back and forth from one to the other and showing her white teeth in a series of dazzling smiles.

Just at this moment Cheyenne Harry and Molly Lafond, returning from one of their numerous expeditions, caught sight of the animated group near the hotel, and naturally turned aside to investigate its cause.

Bismarck Anne faced toward them.

"Why, Harry!" she cried, holding out both hands, "you here? I didn't know you-all hung out in this camp. You look just the same as ever. 'Spose you're goin' to take in th' dance to-night. Yes, that's what I came over for; that an' nothing else. We'll have to stir this camp up a bit and make her seem like old times. I'm afraid you boys have been getting a little slow," she flashed good-humoredly at the others. "Harry, you ought to have seen them when I kissed that boy over there, just for a 'kid,' you know. I don't believe you've got a girl in this camp who knows beans, and it's about time you did. I'm *mighty* glad to see you. But you got to watch out, though! This is a pretty good-looking lot of boys, and you'll have to hustle to hold your job." She said this still holding both his hands in hers, and alternately smiling now at him, now at the men about her. She had taken rapid stock of Molly—whom she now ignored for the moment—and had as rapidly come to the conclusion that if a rival were to appear at all, it would be Harry's companion. She hoped her speech would at the same time

attach Harry to herself, and render assiduous his devotions by a fear of rivalry.

"You bet we will!" cried Harry. His manner was enthusiastic, not so much with joy over seeing Bismarck Anne, as with instinctive relief from the tension of his rather sentimental interview with Molly. He remembered the latter and performed some sort of an introduction.

The two women looked each other in the eye.

"How do you do?" asked Molly coolly, without moving an inch.

"Very well, my dear," replied Bismarck Anne smiling, "and very glad to get here."

The endearing epithet relegated Molly at once to the category of little girls.

The conversation continued for some moments longer, the men standing as silent spectators. Molly continued very reserved. The newcomer did not appear to notice it, but chattered on unconcernedly in a light-hearted fashion, appealing to the other just often enough to convey the idea that there was nothing noticeably repellent in her manner. In fact she did it so well that the group gained the impression that Molly carried her share of the small talk, which was not true. But in spite of the apparent good-feeling Cheyenne Harry felt uncomfortably that something was wrong. Searching about for the cause, he at last discovered it in Molly's attitude.

So on the way to the cabin he was vexed, and showed it. And Molly felt so strongly the innate justice of her position and appreciated so keenly the skill with which she had been made to appear sulky and unreasonable, that when she had finally shut her own door behind her,

she threw herself on her bed and cried as though her heart would break. Then her blood told. She dried her eyes and in her inmost heart she declared war against this woman, war to the knife and to the uttermost. The momentary defeat dashed her at first, then it nerved her. After all nothing definite had occurred. This creature had planted several stinging thrusts which had hit home because Molly, in the innocence of her heart, was not expecting them. She was on her guard now. It would not happen again. Cheyenne Harry had known the woman before, evidently, and surely it was natural that in the first surprise of seeing her so unexpectedly, he should display a certain enthusiasm of recognition. But his relations with her—Molly Lafond—were too intimate, too long-continued, to be lightly broken.

As the twilight fell she saw, through the oblong of her sliding window, that men were hurrying by to dine early, in order that they might prepare for the festivities of the evening. Across the square she could make out the dim shape of the new dance hall, a long low structure trimmed with evergreens and bunting. Frosty was even then lighting the lamps in the Little Nugget. She sat there motionless, staring out into the night, fingering the soft white stuff of the gown lying across her lap, until a certain peace came to her and a conviction that all would be well.

The night was warm and balmy with the odors of early spring. Molly had slid back the halves of her narrow window, and over the boxes of flowers that fringed this little artificial horizon the mellow notes of the first whitethroat, that nightingale of the north, floated in on the tepid air. Beyond the nearer silhou-

ette of the flowers another dimmer silhouette of the hills wavered uncertainly beneath a few uncertain stars. The girl watched these stars idly, dreaming in tune with the plaintive notes of the bird. Then silently another bulkier silhouette interposed itself, almost filling the window.

"What is it?" she cried, starting.

"It's I," came the voice of Jack Graham. The silhouette rested two black-outlined elbows against the sill.

"My, how you frightened me!" she cried pettishly. "What in the world do you want? Why aren't you at dinner?"

"Molly," said Graham solemnly, "I don't suppose you'll listen to me. We haven't gotten along very well lately, have we? But I want you to know that I am asking this for your sake, and that I believe it."

She was impressed by the sincere quality of his tone. "Why, Jack," she said softly, "I know you mean well, and I suppose I *am* very frivolous and careless. What is it?"

"I wish you would not go to the dance to-night."

There fell a pause. She was evidently in a softened mood and she wished to conduct the interview considerately. "But, Jack," she hesitatingly asked at last. "Do you think there is going to be trouble?"

"It will only give you pain. You are going to be forced against things you have never had to combat before."

"I don't understand you."

"I am going to talk very plainly, Molly; I hope you won't get angry. I can't help it if you do. It's because I love you so, girl; I love you so!"

His voice was deep and rich with emotion, so poignant and compelling that it forced her attention in spite of herself. This was a declaration, she dimly felt, and yet its import as such was somehow lost in the more pregnant subject-matter to which it but added emphasis.

"Go on," she said breathlessly.

"You are well liked by everybody here," he continued, carefully avoiding more pointed personalities, "and you have grown so used to being liked by everybody that it would hurt you cruelly if you were not. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," assented Molly gravely, after a moment's consideration.

"You want to hold first place in their thoughts and in their goodwill. You want to *be* first with them and you want them to show to you and to each other by their actions that they are your best friends and are going to stand by you. Do I read you right?"

"Yes, of course I want all the boys to like me. I've known them so long, and I should feel dreadfully if they didn't. But what do you mean by it? I don't understand."

The silhouette moved uneasily. "Now don't get angry," he pleaded. "Take to-night. To speak plainly, you want to be the woman who receives the most attention at that ball. Answer frankly."

"Well," confessed the girl after another moment's hesitation, "frankly then, I do."

"You will not."

"Why?"

"Because the woman who came this afternoon, Bismarck Anne, will take your place."

Molly Lafond would have become angry if her ex-

perience of the afternoon had not already made her uneasy on just this point.

"Do you consider her more attractive than me?" she asked a little resentfully.

"A thousand times No!" assured the silhouette.

"Has she known the boys as long as I? Is she as good friends with them? Can she talk better? Is she brighter?"

"No."

"Then I don't believe I quite see."

"It's just this. The men all like you and admire you, and would do anything for you, but at the same time they look up to you a little. You are better than they are, so, more or less, they are a little—well—a little *restricted* with you. This woman is their sort. She isn't a bit better than they are. When they are out to have a good time, like at the dance to-night, they want somebody they can have their sort of fun with. *You are too good for them.*"

"That is very theoretical."

"It is very true."

"And supposing, just supposing, it were. You want me to lie down and quit without making a fight. Do you call that being game? What would you think of a man who would run away because the other man was a little stronger? Don't you think I'd fight?"

"That's just it. You'd fight too well."

"I don't——"

"She has ways of drawing men to her which you know nothing about. They are her weapons. I know you'd fight. You'd fight to the last because it is in you to, and I'm afraid, very much afraid, that when you found your weapons were not enough you'd use hers."

There fell between them a long silence, while Molly slowly pondered these last words and gradually apprehended their meaning. In the darkness she could feel the blood tingeinig her face, forehead, and neck. At first she was inclined to be angry and to show it, but the man's evident sincerity, coupled with the fervor of his incidental declaration of love, softened her.

"I don't believe I ever had anybody tell me such things before," she could not restrain herself from saying, "and I don't know whether I ought to thank you for your lack of trust in me. However, you'll be there, and I can rely on your protection against these awful dangers."

"I will not be there," contradicted Graham bluntly.

"Well, then, there's Harry." She said the name out of bravado to show that there was no reason why she should not say it.

"Yes," cried Graham, with a burst of anger that astonished her. "It is he I mean."

It was the red flag to them both, the idea of this man. "I think you'd better go now," she replied coldly.

Graham turned away with a little curse.

She sat down again and tried desperately to regain her confidence of a few moments before, but it would not come. She was angry and insulted, and she was vexed at herself that she could not throw off the uneasiness which lay behind these emotions; but she could not. It grew on her as her nervousness increased. She sat staring straight before her into the dark, clasping and unclasping her hands, and striving with all the earnestness of which she was capable to seize and formulate the vague fear that seemed un-

reasonably to weigh on her spirits. Analyze it as she would, she could find no adequate reason for it. It was therefore the more terrible. The dinner hour passed quite unnoticed. The nervousness increased until she could have shrieked aloud. And then with a sudden start she recognized it—this old formless causeless sense of an indefinite guilt, as for something left undone; the voice, although this she did not know, of her inherited New England conscience.

At the discovery she rebelled. She had always rebelled, and heretofore she had succeeded in putting it down, in stifling it underneath mere surface moods. But now the surface moods proved inadequate. The uneasy guiltiness increased until it almost overflowed in tears. Molly was afraid, just as a child is afraid of the dark.

She lit the lamps and looked at herself in the mirror. This must not go on. To-night, the one night when she needed all her powers, it was foolish to allow a whim to weaken them. She shook her head at herself and smiled. The smile was not a success. She turned away wearily and thrust her hands through her hair. Why had Graham taken it into his head to bother her this one evening of all others? It was his fault. She stamped her foot angrily. All his fault. In spite of his denial, she believed he would be there and would see everything. The thought stung her pride and the desire for tears left her. She would show him just how much his advice and his fears were worth. On the impulse she spread her white dress out on the bed, and began hastily to smooth out the wrinkles in its pleats. After a moment she turned decisively to the mirror, and began to take down her hair.

XXX

ANCESTRAL VOICES

ARCHIBALD MUDGE, alias Frosty, dressed in a clean white apron, stood behind the bar and surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction. It had gone well, and for this one day his master had been in an unwontedly good humor.

Directly opposite, a wide door opened into the new dance hall. From where Frosty stood one could see that it was a long low room, flag-draped, with few windows, and furnished only by an unbroken line of benches against the wall. One standing in the doorway, however, could have perceived that at one end were placed for the musicians a number of tall "look-out" stools—tall in order that the performers might at once overlook the performance of the square-dance "figures," and early prepare to avoid possible hostilities. A number of large lamps with reflectors illuminated the apartment with crossed shafts of light.

Frosty polished glasses in anticipation of the evening's business, which would be lively, glancing complacently from the fresh-scrubbed floor to the lately renewed sheets, imitating plaster. As the outer door was now closed, he was relieved from the necessity of ejecting Peter. It did no good to tie Peter up: either the animal was ingenious at escapes, or the men were mischievous in their desire to bother Frosty. This was one of Frosty's many troubles. He led a life of care.

After a little, the door opened, and three men came

in. They steered to the bar at once, as a sort of familiar haven in strange surroundings. From its anchorage they took their initial view of the hall. After subsequent arrivals had braced them to the point of confidence, they made a first awful tour of that apartment, but soon returned to more familiar surroundings. The saloon filled with a heterogeneous gathering. All types were there in their best clothes, from the spotlessly immaculate faro dealer, dressed in a black broadcloth frock coat, to Dave Kelly, with his new red handkerchief and his high-heeled boots. The main gathering remained crowded in the saloon, whence small groups occasionally ventured into the hall, but only for the purposes of temporary inspection. A hum of low-voiced talk went up, which fell to expectant silence every time the door was opened. The musicians from Spanish Gulch arrived and began to tune up. They were closely followed by the first woman, a red-cheeked awkward country lass, who took her position on the bench near one corner and began at once to dispense smiles and loud small talk to the men who followed her there. The assistants' spirits rose. They had known this girl as Sal Jenks, of rather drab-colored disposition and appearance. To-night, in the glamour of a light-colored dress and the illumination of a ball room, she had suddenly become transformed into something quite different and infinitely more attractive. The musicians played a tune. The other women came in, gayly dressed and accompanied always by a red-faced swain. Black Mike took his stand at the side of Frosty, and began to assist that individual in dispensing drinks. Black Mike's democracy was no small element of his popularity. At about half-past eight those

near the door saw him talking with Cheyenne Harry. A buzz swept over the room. Copper Creek had been waiting in suppressed excitement to see whom Cheyenne Harry would accompany—Molly Lafond or the newcomer—and lo! he had come alone.

Then, before the astonishment had subsided, the outer door opened again and Molly entered, looking very pale and sweet and serious.

She walked directly by the bar into the dance hall, where she seated herself near the door and looked calmly about her. She was dressed entirely in white. Cheyenne Harry was leaning over the bar talking attentively, so that he was perhaps the only person in the room who did not see her come in. A dozen men at once surrounded her and began to chat. She answered them good-humoredly enough, but indifferently.

The door once more flew open and Bismarck Anne, standing on the sill, cried out in her clear, high voice, "Well, boys!" She paused a moment. Cheyenne Harry, turning at the sound of her voice, remembered how, about a year ago, Molly Lafond had stood there in just that attitude. But he felt a great difference.

Cheyenne Harry had for some time, as we have said, been growing a little tired of his affair with Molly. The mental ingredients of satiety were all present, but he had as yet received no conscious notice of their existence. He imagined himself as much fascinated as ever. If something lately had seemed to lack, he had laid it to circumstances and not at all to the state of his relations with the girl. But for all that, the satiety had been real. He only needed to be told of it to realize it himself very plainly. Bismarck Anne had told him.

He saw now absolutely no attraction for himself in Molly Lafond, and that without attempting to deny her intrinsic attraction for others. He simply did not care for her any more. It seemed perhaps like a sudden revulsion, but it was not so really; it had been inevitable from the very first, and from the very first it had been slowly maturing. Not even the results were sudden: only Cheyenne Harry's knowledge of them.

He had always felt his relations with Molly Lafond as more or less restrictive, because the good is always so. He had dimly caught the truth that, without a deep moral incentive, restriction is always irksome; that although pure love is the most ideal condition in the world, its simulation is the most wearisome after the novelty has worn off; and all the rest of the long psychological train of emotion and reasoning common to the trifler. But now for the first time he knew it. He knew it because, standing in the doorway, looking at him with bold black eyes, was the exact opposite of all this, and he recognized a mighty relief.

Bismarck Anne knew enough to dress all in black. She had the taste to appreciate the effect of one red flower in her hair as her only ornament. She had the sense to wear her dress cut neither too low above nor too high below. And so she was exceedingly handsome as she stood there, the devil of excitement in her eyes.

Cheyenne Harry abruptly ceased his conversation with Lafond to shake hands with her. They turned in company. Harry linked his arm through hers, and they entered the dance hall close together, and took their seats in a corner far removed from the musicians, where they continued engaged in such earnest con-

versation that none of the men ventured to approach them. After a time, when the music struck up for the first dance, she seemed to be commanding something to which Cheyenne Harry seemed to be objecting. Then the latter arose slowly and asked Molly Lafond to dance the first dance with him. She accepted with a sharp pang at her heart. The newcomer had scored.

Owing to the scarcity of the gentler sex, it had been decided that no one " set " was to be blessed with more than one girl. Thus they would go around better. Molly, glancing across at her rival, saw that she was surrounded by a laughing group of men. The woman was joking broadly at each, wriggling her white shoulders, darting side glances, half promising, half denying. In a moment the group broke, and the members of it rushed in her own direction. They were already quarrelling for places in her set. The matter was arranged somehow after much wrangling. Then, too late, Molly saw that the other woman had scored again. Bismarck Anne had not only selected her partner, but also the other six members of the set. Thus she had made seven men happy and none jealous.

A Western dance is a sight worth seeing. The musicians call off the figures. The head fiddler does it until his voice gives out. Then the second fiddler and the accordion take a try at it, after which further calling is unnecessary owing to the fact that most of the dancers are very drunk. This comes to pass because, at the end of each dance, all are supposed to visit the bar. The most heinous crime, next to horse stealing or sluice robbing, is " shying drinks " at such times. As some men can hold more than others this

enforced equality of quantity consumed brings about unexpected variation in the hilarity of the consumers, all of which adds to the variety of the occasion.

The interims between drinks are occupied by square dances. The men go through some set of monkey shines which they call figures, the principal object of which seems to be at once the tripping up of such male and the prolonged squeezing of such female dancers as they may come into intimate personal relations with on their grand rounds, which is conducive to hilarity of the loud-mouthed variety. The exercise itself is rather violent, and as the room is low, lit by lamps, and comparatively windowless, the air soon becomes heavy with the reek of perspiration and the fumes of tobacco. The floor acquires a heaving motion and the lights sway back and forth. The homeliest of the dance-hall girls somehow looks like a fairy through the haze—a rather elusive fairy, with a rather heavy unfairylike gait. At this period there is usually a good deal of noise. Then all at once it is morning, and somehow the scene has changed to the ravine, and there is a tomato can poking itself into the small of the back.

Molly tripped gracefully and easily through the figures of the opening dance, seeming scarcely to touch the floor. Bismarck Anne leaned heavily on each man in the swing, and pressed her bosom against his arm. Twice she half slipped and caught by the shoulder of her partner of the moment, and her breath was hot against his throat. She said not one word the whole dance through.

With the last quaver of the fiddle came the harsh command—

"S'lute yore pardners! All promenade to th' bar!"

They obeyed. The sets went in two by two, the men treating their masculine partners with humorous politeness in the matter of assistance in crossing the sill of the door. The non-dancers crowded after them in a confused mob.

At the bar Frosty had the drinks all ready on the back shelf. Black Mike assisted him, and together the two, their sleeves rolled back and their faces glistening with the sweat of honest toil, passed over brimming little glasses of "forty rod" and jingled two-bit pieces into the drawer. Bismarck Anne drank with the best of them, leaning familiarly against the men nearest her, bandying jokes that were more than doubtful. Molly sat on her corner of the bar but did not drink.

At the beginning of the next dance the aspect of things was a trifle changed. A bigger crowd gathered about Bismarck Anne soliciting places in her set, and it was more familiar. Some one snatched a kiss of her. She merely laughed and pushed him away. There seemed to have suddenly sprung up between them and her a *camaraderie* in which Molly had no part, as though they and the newcomer had some secret to keep to themselves which thrust the younger girl without the circle.

Cheyenne Harry did not come near her again. He seemed wholly fascinated by the stranger. The sight of his attentions to the other aroused Molly. A bright red spot burned in either cheek. She was all animation. Her laughter rang true, her eyes flashed with merriment. For every one she had a joke, a half-tender, half-sympathetic aside. She saw that as long as they were in her actual presence the men were

wholly hers. And yet she felt too the subtle growth of this other woman's influence, and realized that eventually it would beat her down. In spite of her brave appearance her throat choked her. Only by a great concentration of the will could she prevent herself from lapsing into silence, and then into tears. As the strain began to tell on her nerves, the old feeling of unknowable guilt came to oppress her heart, and with it a growing longing to get away, to hide somewhere; to begin all over again humbly, below the lowest; to claim nothing, to attempt nothing, to do nothing in opposition to that accusing Thought which seemed greater than herself. All at once she was tired of struggling. She was ready to give up this life, if only they would let her feel like something besides a breathless naughty child, fearfully expecting every moment the grave reproving voice of the Master.

She chided herself for this. It was not game. Pluck she admired above everything; and yet here she was, ready to run away at the first taste of defeat. She smiled ravishingly on Dave Kelly, until he began to speculate on the possibility of repeating that delicious experience which Peter had so inopportunely cut short.

As the evening progressed, the "forty rod" began to show its effects. Williams had to have the full width of the floor whenever he tried to walk, and his enthusiastic imitations of an angry catamount were most creditable. Some one was always disgustedly repressing him. Several others were in like condition with different symptoms. The soberest manifested increased vigor of limb and fertility of imagination. A happy combination of these two effects brought about

the proposal of a turkey walk. A ring was formed on the instant.

Into the ring two men, chosen *vivâ voce*, were pushed. They began at once to strut back and forth like turkey cocks in the spring. They hollowed their backs in, stuck their chests and rumps out, slapped their thighs, toed in, puffed their cheeks, ducked their heads, uttered sundry gurgling whoops, and hopped about, first on one foot, then on the other in a charmingly, impartial imitation of a Southern cake walk and a Sioux Indian war dance. These performances tickled the crowd immensely. When it came to noisy vote on the relative merits of the performers, it vociferously shouted unanimous approval of all. Therefore the contest was pronounced a tie. At this moment Dave Williams staggered forward. His muddled brain had room for only the most evident facts. He saw the ring and his drunken shrewdness had retained cognizance of the evening's rivalry. He mixed the two ideas up to effect a proposal.

"Hyar," he shouted, "lesh do this ri'! I secon' Bismarck Anne!" He let out a wild-cat yell—"Whe-ee!! Two t' one on Anne!"

Some one hit him on the chest and sent him staggering backward. He gyrated unevenly toward the corner, stumbled over his own feet, and sat down heavily on the floor, where after feeling vainly for his gun he relapsed into good humor. But his suggestion hit the popular fancy.

The idea ran like fire. In a second the ring was formed again. Those in front knelt; those behind looked over their shoulders. Even Frosty and Black Mike deserted the bar and stood leaning in the door-

way. The girls were urged forward into the ring, which closed after them, and the music was ordered to proceed.

Bismarck Anne walked calmly into the circle and stood looking about her. Molly had an instant of doubt. Then a revulsion against her easy surrender got her to her feet and into the ring. The gauntlet was down. She would accept the challenge. It was a duel.

There was a moment's squabble between two self-appointed officials in regard to precedence. It was settled, and Molly was beckoned to begin. The fiddles started up a squeaky, lively air to which the men kept time with hands and feet. The young girl, her cheeks burning, stepped into the centre of the ring and struck the first graceful pose of the *cachucha*, learned years before at the Agency from a little Mexican serving-maid. The men recognized it in a swift quickly silenced burst. The fiddles changed their measure to suit the dance.

The *cachucha* is a beautiful dance when rightly done. It is a combination of airy half-steps, sinuous body movements, and slow languorous and graceful weavings of the arms. It has in it all the enchantment of the lazy South. There is not an abrupt movement in it, but one pose melts into another as imperceptibly as night into day. Molly did it well. Her supple figure was suited to it, and the very refinement of her actions enhanced the charm of the dance. The men applauded vehemently when she stopped. The other woman laughed aloud in scorn.

With a final sweeping curtsy the dancer turned to go. The flush of triumph and excitement burned on her cheeks and in her eyes. Finding the ring solidly

closed so that exit was impossible, she accepted a seat on the knee of one of those in the front rank. The man put his arms around her and drew her close in a drunken embrace, which the girl only half noticed.

Bismarck Anne sprang to the centre of the ring at one bound, the sneer still on her lips. She turned abruptly to the musicians.

"Quit that damn stuff!" she snarled. "Play somethin'!"

The musicians hurriedly swung into a lively air.

Bismarck Anne's dance was not especially graceful. It consisted mainly of high kicks and a certain athletic feat known as the split. But it was magnificent in its abandon, and fierce in the crude animal energy of it. Besides its mere suggestiveness and appeal to the passions, it had too a swing, a fire, a brute-like force which could not but hit to the hearts of men at bottom strong, crude, and savage. They went crazy. They shouted encouraging things at her with open straining throats. They stamped and cheered until the lights wavered. They clapped each other delightedly on the back. And Bismarck Anne danced ever the more furiously. She kicked with enthusiasm, with abandon, holding her short skirts still higher to gain the greater freedom. The tiger-lily fell from her head and was snatched up almost before it touched the floor. Her heavy black hair came down, and hung in strands across her face, and fell in vivid contrast upon her white shoulders and her heaving bosom. She shook it back with a savage movement.

And she in the corner, who was nothing but a woman, with little of the savage in her to appeal to savage men, and, for all her independence, little of this

bold reckless spirit of the frontier in her to appeal to pioneers, felt herself growing sick and faint as she saw these greater forces slipping beyond her control roaringly, as would a mountain torrent. Her rule was over, and this woman's had begun. The room swayed before her eyes. Some one behind her handed a brimming glass of whisky over her shoulder, and she seized it eagerly and gulped it down.

The unaccustomed stimulant cleared her vision. The room stood still, the different objects in it became distinct. She looked on the whirling figure of the woman in the centre, the open-mouth turmoil-stirred crowd in the background, with dispassionate eyes. She was deadly cool. To her memory came Graham's words of that same afternoon. "*Because you are too good for them!*" She remembered the very emphasis of his tone. Well, he was right, and yet not right. She had been too good for them, but she would show them now! With the sudden flash of resolve, the first unnatural hardening effect of the whisky passed, and in a whirl the exhilaration came. She laughed and responded convulsively to the man's embrace.

Bismarck Anne gave a final kick, and fell in some one's open arms. The men, shouting frantically, began to stir preparatory to regaining their feet. Then they sank back again with a fresh cheer. Into the centre of the ring Molly tripped unsteadily, and stood for a moment looking about her with uncertain foolishly smiling eyes. Her cheeks were a glow of red. She glanced toward the musicians, and, with the tip of her fingers, raised her dress to her knees, waiting for the music to begin.

The room was deadly still. She could see, looking

at her excitedly, all the men she had met and come to know in the last year. She saw them dimly, as through a haze. Would the music never begin? What were they waiting for? A draught blew cold along the floor. She felt it on her legs. Why was it? Oh, yes, she was holding her skirts up to dance, to show them that she was no better than this woman, Bismarck Anne.

And then the black cloud that had been gathering so long, the undefined guilty feeling at nothing, broke over her. She wanted to go on—the music had begun now—but she could not. Twice she tried. Something held her, something real, something stronger than herself. She did not recognize them, these ancestral voices, but they laid upon her their commands. She dropped her skirts, and covered her eyes with her two hands, and burst through the ring of men, and ran out through the night to her own cabin, where she threw herself on her bed weeping bitterly. She was ashamed.

XXXI

LAFOND'S FIRST CARD

LAFOND, in the meantime, had left the dispensation of drinks almost entirely to Frosty. He darted here and there in the crowd, a light of unwonted excitement in his eye.

"That thar Mike's shore waked up," commented Old Mizzou. "Never see him so plumb animated. He shore looks nutty. Dance halls is mostly too rich fer his blood, I reckon."

But Tony Houston and Jack Snowie and a dozen others by now knew better than to attribute this excitement to dance halls. Lafond possessed in his pocket a copy of Knapp's dismissal, and he had told them of it.

He told them of it mysteriously, in half-limits, pointing out tendencies and solutions to what they already knew, leaving them to draw deductions, sowing anxieties that there might spring up a harvest of distrust.

Through the woof of gayety he rapidly ran a dull thread of angry suspicion. Men made merry, and forgot all the past and all the future. Other men talked low-voiced in corners, and tried, from the distraction of drink and gayety, to draw clear plan and reflection. And always Lafond took other men aside and whispered eager little half-confidences, and went on quickly to the next.

His spirit was upheld by a great excitement, such as it had never experienced before, not even in his

early and adventurous days. He seemed to himself to be mounting higher and higher on the summit of a great wave of luck, as a swimmer is lifted by the sea. And yet, behind it all, again for the first time in his life, he felt a portent in the air. It was as though the wave were rearing itself, only to curl over and break upon the shore. He laid this to nervousness, and yet it affected him with a certain superstitious awe.

So occupied was he, that he quite missed the girl's sudden exit, and was drawn from his brown study only by the sudden hush that succeeded it. In the silence a drunken voice uplifted itself loudly.

"M' work 'sh done," it vociferated. "I wan' m' pay!"

Everybody turned, prepared to laugh at this "comic relief!" Jack Snowie was addressing Billy Knapp. Billy at once became conscious of an audience, and the usual desire to appear well seized him. He smiled with the good-humored tolerance of a drunken man.

"I suppose you want me to take it right out of my pants pocket, eh, Jack?" he inquired paternally. "Of co'se you wants yo' pay! Come around in th' mornin' an' get it." He smiled again at the group that surrounded him. It appeared to be listening to this colloquy with unusual interest.

"I wan' m' pay!" reiterated Snowie sullenly, but then apparently lost the thread of his ideas and lurched away. Billy considered the incident closed. He was mistaken. The group did not dissolve; it came closer. The men had a strangely unfriendly look about the eyes. Billy did not understand it. He stepped toward one side of the circle about him. It closed the tighter to keep him in.

"What's the joke, boys?" he asked, still smiling.

The room was breathlessly still. Many of those within it did not understand the trouble, but trouble was in the air. Across a wavering line of heat could be dimly discerned the musicians, poised to start the next dance, but uncertain whether or not to begin. They did not begin. The silence was startled even by Peter's doggy yawn from the far corner of the saloon proper.

"Ain't no joke!" "That's what we want to know!" "Damned poor joke!" "You'll find out soon enough!" cried the men angrily, and then paused and looked at each other because of the jostle of words that meant nothing.

Billy flushed slowly, and his jaw settled into place.

"I'm jest as willin' to play 'horse' as anybody," he said, trying to find calm utterance; "and if this is a joke, I wishes some fellow-citizen to let me in. But, damn it!" he cried in a burst, "don't you get too funny! What the hell does you-all want me to do to carry out this yere witticism, anyway?"

The coolest and most determined looking man in the group made two steps across the floor, and confronted Billy squarely. At this evidence of earnestness, Billy lost his excitement and became deadly cool.

"Oh, it's you, Tony Houston, is it! Do you want your pay too?"

"Yes, I do," replied the man, "and I'm going to have it."

"Well," said Billy, "here's a pretty-lookin' outfit! Snowie was drunk, but this gang 's sober enough to know better, anyway. You come around to my office in the mornin', and I pays the bunch, every damn

skunk, and don't you ever any of you show your faces there again. That's all I got to say."

"It ain't all *I* got to say," retorted Houston, standing his ground doggedly, "not by a long shot! You-all talks well, but has you got th' money?"

"What the——" cried Billy, choking.

"Hol' on thar! I repeats it"—and Houston thrust his face at Billy evilly—"has you got th' money? That's a fa'r question in business, I reckons. Has you got th' money? No, you hasn't. You got just an hundred and fifty-two dollars, and that's every red cent you has got."

Billy's immediate act of homicide was checked by this astounding knowledge of the total of his bank account. "Damn you, Tony Houston," he said slowly, at last, "I believe you're drunk too. You come in the mornin' and get paid, an' you'll find yore money comes along all right. This is a hell of a gang," he went on with contempt, "a hell of a gang! I gets you a job that lasts you all winter, and you wants your damn money in a dance hall and raises a row because I ain't carryin' a few thousan' dollars in each pants pocket. Don' think you makes anythin' by it. I lays myself out from now on to see that yore little two by four prospect holes ain't worth th' powder to blow 'em up, and I reckon I has a little influence as superintendent of this game."

"Superintendent?" cried Houston, and the men about laughed loudly.

Billy was plainly even more bewildered than angry. He considered the crowd all, as he expressed it, "plum' locoed"; but his passions, never of the most peaceful, were rising. In another moment he would have

knocked Houston down and drawn his gun on the crowd which surrounded him, but that Michaïl Lafond shoved his way through the press. Billy caught sight of him with relief. Besides the plain bare fact of a row, the situation was complicated by the presence of so great an audience, before whom Billy naturally wished to conduct the affair correctly.

"What is the trouble? Here, this won't do!" cried Black Mike, as though in the capacity of proprietor preserving the respectability of his establishment.

"That's what I wants to know," cried Billy. "This (sulphurous) outfit of ranikaboo ijits has gone plum' locoed, and they stan's around yere howlin' for tha'r money as though I carries th' Philadelphy mint in my clothes!"

Lafond did not reply. He motioned the men aside, and, with the utmost gentleness, led the wondering Billy to a far corner of the room.

"I'm sorry that I have this to do, Billy," said Lafond. "I don't want to. It's none of my lay-out. But these men of yours sent them to me because I am notary public and I must do it."

Billy did not understand, but he caught the apology in Lafond's tone.

"That's all right, old man," he assured the latter, moistening his lips.

Without further preamble, the half-breed drew some papers from his breast pocket, and handed them to Billy.

The first was a review of the work done on the Great Snake group of claims, and a detailed analysis of it, carried out with astounding minuteness of techni-

cal knowledge for one so ignorant of mining as Stevens. It outlined also the work that should have been done; and it ended with a general conclusion of incompetence. The second contained his formal dismissal as superintendent. The third returned Billy's shares as his portion in the Company's dissolution, said Company having dissolved without assets.

Billy sat very quietly and read the papers over three times, while his fellow townsmen stood silent and watched him. The first perusal bewildered him, and turned him sick at heart with disappointment and recognition of the estimate in which men held him. The second brought to his consciousness that his companions were regarding him; and that, in turn, caused him to realize that his prestige was crumbled, his integrity dishonored, his abilities belittled. The third impressed on him the desperate straits in which he found himself—without money, holding a doubtful interest in claims whose bad name was by this established so firmly that no Eastern capital would ever take hold of them again, the moral if not legal debtor to these men who had worked all winter for him. The iron turned in his soul. Michaïl Lafond, sitting there in the rôle of sympathizer, was well satisfied with his handiwork. For the moment, Billy Knapp was a broken man.

He arose slowly, and passed out of the door in the dead silence of those about him.

After his exit, the dance was forgotten and an earnest discussion raged. It was no light matter. Eleven men had invested heavily in powder, fuse, drills, and windlasses for the purpose of fulfilling their contract with Knapp; and they, and twenty-two others, had

put in their time for a number of months. Many of them owed for board or materials. Others, though out of debt, had spent nearly all their ready cash. They all seemed desperately close to bankruptcy, for Lafond said nothing whatever respecting his agreement to pay the contracts himself. And then again, as has been pointed out, the well-being of the whole camp had depended intimately on the success of its big mine, for the success of one enterprise like the Great Snake draws other capital to the district, rendering possible the sale of claims; while its failure always gives a bad name to a whole section.

So the ensuing discussion had plenty of interest for everybody. Lafond, as the bearer of the tidings, was besieged with questions. He was reluctant, but he answered. Besides, the facts were plain, ready for interpretation. Nobody could help seeing that it was all Billy's fault. After a time, poor Billy loomed large as a symbol of all the camp's misfortune. After a little time more, when the bar had more thoroughly done its work, a number became possessed of a desire to abate Billy.

They seized torches and a rope, ran up the gulch, and beat in the door of the office, only to encounter Billy enraged to the point of frenzy. That individual rushed them out at the muzzle of a pistol, with such a whirl of impetuous anger that it quite carried them off their feet, after which he planted his back against the building and stood there in the full light of the torches, reviling them. Why he was not shot I cannot tell. Billy was something of a dominant spirit when roused. That was the reason why, in the old days, he had made such a good scout. After he had called them all the names he could think of, he slammed the door

on them. They went away without knowing why they did so.

When they got back to town, they gathered again in the Little Nugget saloon, drinking, swearing, shouting. The morale of the camp was broken. It was a debauch. They cried out against Billy, and they feared him for the moment. They made a stable-boy hide in the brush with a bottle of whisky, to watch the works, to spy on they knew not what. Lafond drank with them. He had never done so before. As they became more noisy, he fell into a sullen fit, and went to sit over behind the stove where he crooned away to himself an old *chanson*. He stopped drinking, but the effects remained. It seemed to his befogged mind that the wave had broken and that he was falling through the air. Shortly he would be cast up against the beach. "A fool for luck!" he muttered to himself, trying to rehabilitate his denuded confidence. He took out the Company's letter to him, saying that the deeds were at Rapid awaiting his action, and read it. Then he put a stick of wood on the fire. He shivered and rubbed his eyes. Finally he went over to the hotel, where he washed his head again and again in cold water. After a time, he returned to the Little Nugget, feeling somewhat better.

It was now daylight, although the sun was not up. The stable-boy came in from the upper gulch to say that Billy Knapp was hitching his horses to the buckboard. The news sobered them somewhat. Ten minutes later, the stable-boy again returned with the news that Knapp had loaded his buckboard, and was on the point of driving through town. A dozen men at once ran out into the street and concealed themselves behind the corners of buildings.

XXXII

IN WHICH THERE IS SOME SHOOTING

BILLY sat in a chair and boiled. He did not calm down until after daylight, and then he found that his depression had vanished. He was full of vigor. He went out and looked over the property very carefully. The entire lay-out, he found, had weighed on his spirits, and this last ungrateful episode had made him sick of the whole miserable business. He ought never to be tied down. He could see his mistake clearly enough now. If he was going to stick to gold hunting, it ought to be as a prospector, not as a miner. A prospector enjoyed the delight of new country, of wilderness life, of the chase, and then, when civilization came too near, he could sell his claims to the miner and move on to a virgin country. A miner, on the other hand, had to settle down in one place and attend to all manner of vexatious details. Billy felt a great impatience to shake himself free. With the thought came a wave of anger against the men of the town. After all, what had he to gain by staying? This outfit was a fizzle; nothing could be done with it in the future. He might save something of the wreck by grubbing about in the débris, but grubbing was exactly what he wanted to get away from.

He looked over the works again. He was astonished to find how little of it he cared for personally. There remained not much more than the Westerner's outfit, when it was winnowed—four good horses, the buck-

board, his saddle, clothes, his weapons, and the beautiful trotting horse. Billy could not let that go. The camp outfit they could have and welcome. He kicked the rubber stamper into space, scattering potential literature about the landscape. Many things he hesitated over, but finally discarded. The heap was not very large when all was told.

He began to experiment with the buckboard. Billy was a master of the celebrated diamond hitch. After an hour's earnest work, he drew back triumphantly to observe to himself that all he wished to take with him was securely packed on the vehicle. Then he coupled in his grays, and led out the beautiful trotting horse. He was glad that he had lately paid the English groom his wages; which individual he remembered seeing, the night before, dead drunk in a corner. Billy made himself some coffee in the empty cookee's shack, and was ready to start.

He did not know exactly where he would go; that was a matter of detail, but somewhere West in all probability—somewhere in Wyoming, where Jim Buckley was hidden up in the mountains, living a sane sort of a life, removed from the corroding influences of civilization. He did not realize that in this impatient shaking off of responsibility, he was little better than a moral coward. Even Billy's worst enemies would have denied the justice of that epithet.

He climbed in, deliberately unwound the reins from the long brake handle, clucked to the horses, and took his way, whistling, down the narrow trail. The beautiful trotting horse followed gingerly, tossing his head. At the entrance to town, Billy's whistling suddenly ceased. The street was quite bare and silent. Not

even from the Little Nugget saloon or the new dance hall came the faintest sound of human occupancy. A tenderfoot might have argued that this was indicative of deep sleep after last night's festivities, but Billy knew better. At seven o'clock in the morning, after excitement such as that of a few hours before, the normal ensuing pow-wow would still be raging unabated. He reached under the seat for his Winchester, the new 40-82 model of his prosperous days, and laid it softly across his lap, and caught the end of the long lash in his whip hand. Then he resumed his tune exactly where it had been broken off, looking neither to right nor left, and jogging along without the slightest appearance of haste or uneasiness. No one could have called Billy Knapp a coward at that moment.

Near the first cabin the whistling broke off again. A little figure stumbled out into the deserted street, weeping and afraid. Billy pulled up. It was the Kid.

"They're goin' to shoot you," he sobbed, "from behind the Little Nugget, without givin' you a chanst! I had to tell you, an' they'll most kill me!" he wailed. Billy's eyes began to sparkle. The Kid tried to hold within the other's reach his little 22 calibre rifle, his most precious possession. "Here, take this!" he begged.

Billy laughed outright, a generous, hearty laugh with just a shade of something serious in it. "Thank ye," said he, "I got one. And let me tell ye right yere, you Kid. Yore a white man, you are, and yore jest about the only white man in the place." He cast his eyes about him in the buckboard at his feet. "Yere ye be," he said, tugging at a pair of huge silver-ornamented Mexican spurs and leaning over to give them to the

boy; "jest remember me by them thar; they has my name in 'em; and, look yere," he went on with a sudden inspiration, "you-all gets up gulch to my camp and takes what grub you finds and lies low until yo' paw an' th' rest gits over bein' mad. I don't know but what they *does* kill you, if you shows up afore that." And he laughed again to see the boy's face brighten at this prospect of escaping the immediate wrath to follow.

The little scene had been enacted in the middle of the silent street, so silent and so empty that the principal actors in it experienced an uncomfortable emotion of publicity, perhaps a little like that of an inexperienced speaker before the glare of footlights. The Kid, followed friskily by Peter, scuttled up the gulch. Billy stood up in his buckboard and faced the inscrutable row of houses.

"Yo' damn coyotes!" he yelled, "thar goes the only *man* in the whole outfit. Shoot! yo' Siwashes, shoot!" and he brought his long whip like a figure 8 across the flanks of all four horses at once.

Bang! reverberated a shot between the hills, and a bullet splashed white against the brake bar.

Billy dropped the reins to the floor of the buckboard, and planted his foot on them. He steadied his knee against the seat, and threw down and back the lever of his Winchester for a shot. The beautiful trotting horse was pulling back in an ecstasy of terror at the end of his long lariat, shaking his head and planting his forefeet. Billy cursed savagely, but jerked loose the knot, and the beautiful trotting horse, with a final snort of terror, turned tail and disappeared in the direction of the mine.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went other shots from behind puffs of white smoke. The hills caught up the sound and rolled it back, and then back again, until it was quite impossible to count the discharges.

There were perhaps a half-dozen men with rifles and a dozen or so with six-shooters, all pumping away at it as fast as they could. The buckboard was struck many times. One horse was hit, but only slightly—not enough to interfere with, but rather to encourage his speed. Billy fastened his eyes on the spot whence the first bullet had sped. Suddenly he threw his rifle to his shoulder.

Crack! it spoke, strangly flat out there in the open against the fuller reports of the other pieces.

The bullets which undershot kicked up little puffs of dust, like grasshoppers jumping, while those that passed above, ricochetted finally from rocks and went singing away into the distance. It was a wonder, with so large a mark, that neither the man nor the horses were hit. It must be remembered, however, that the marksmen were more or less drunk, and that Billy's speed was by now something tremendous.

Crack! went his Winchester again.

At the end of the straight road was, as has perhaps been mentioned, a turn of considerable sharpness, flanked by bold cliff-like rocks. In the best of circumstances, this bit of road requires careful driving. With a runaway four and a light buckboard, a smash up was inevitable. The hidden assailants and spectators of the strange duel realized this suddenly. In the interest of the approaching catastrophe, the fusillade ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Billy maintained his first attitude, one knee on the seat, the other foot braced

against the floor, keenly expectant. The silence became breathless, and one or two men leaned forward the better to see.

"*Crack!*" spoke Billy's rifle for the third time. The man who had fired the first shot pitched suddenly forward from behind his sheltering corner, and lay still.

With one swift motion the scout dropped his Winchester in the seat, grasped the four reins, and threw his enormous weight against the bits. The grays had been ranch-bred. They bunched their feet, hunched their backs, and in three heavy buck jumps had slowed down from a breakneck run to a lumbering gallop. Billy Knapp gave vent to the wild shrill war cry of his foster parents, the Oglallah Sioux, and jogged calmly out of sight around the bend of the road.

A great crowd pressed about Tony Houston, prone on the ground. They discovered that the ball had passed through the point of the shoulder, not a dangerous place in itself, but resulting in a serious wound because of the smashing power of the express rifle.

"Damn fine shooting!" they said, looking at each other with admiration. "*Damn* fine."

They began to feel a little more kindly toward Billy on account of this evidence of his skill. They set about bandaging the wounded man.

XXXIII

FUTILITY

AND around that lower bend, half a mile beyond Durand's cabin, Billy encountered in the person of Jim Buckley the very man he intended to search for, and that by not so very strange a chance when all is considered.

After the scouting days were quite over, not long ago, by the way, Jim Buckley had struck out for Wyoming, where he looked about him and finally settled in the Crooked Horn district all alone. He was prospecting. And as he was a great big leisurely sort of fellow, never in a hurry, and quite unconvinced of the necessity for being so, it took him a great many years to complete the prospecting to his satisfaction. In fact it was only recently that he had fully convinced himself and others of the value of what he had found At first he had worked the surface over inch by inch. Then he had staked out his more experimental claims. Then he had burrowed and grubbed and delved, single-handed, through a network of shafts, tunnels, and drifts. It is slow work—single-handed. In the morning you make little holes with a hand drill, and fill them with powder. At noon you blast. In the afternoon you cart away débris by means of an inadequate little bucket. This takes time and patience, both of which Jim Buckley possessed. Once a month he went to town, riding one horse and leading another, for the

purpose of buying supplies. The rest of the time he lived alone.

That is, he lived alone except that directly opposite the window, where the light always struck it fair, he had carefully fastened a small colored portrait on ivory. It was the picture of a woman, delicately tinted, young with laughing blue eyes and a mouth whose corners turned upward in so droll a manner that you would have sworn its owner had never known a care in her fresh young life. It was the picture of another man's wife. She had known care, of the bitterest, blackest kind, and in her darkest days she had been murdered, mercifully perhaps. After he had hauled the last little bucket of broken rock up to the surface of the ground, and had ranged all sorts of utensils in the open fireplace for the evening meal, Jim Buckley used to light his pipe and sit looking at this little portrait for a long time. For, you see, he was simply made, with no complexities—a few simple purposes, a few simple ideas, a few simple friendships, a few simple passions—but they were the stronger and deeper and more soul-satisfying for that. He did not need incident or sorrow or regret to round out his life. It was well poised and sufficient.

So he used to look upon the face of this other man's wife from under sombre brows, but through clear eyes. No one could have guessed what his slow deep thoughts were at such times, nor what he found, whether of peace or unrest, in his contemplation of a portrait of the past. He said it made him better. Perhaps it did.

But there came a time when the windlasses over the rabbit-burrow prospector's shafts had made their last

necessary revolution. Jim Buckley knew the cross section of that country as well as you or I know the cross section of an apple we have just cut in two. Then, having satisfied his purposes, he looked to his friendships. He had never had many. Alfred, Billy Knapp, Hal Townsend, Charley Fanchild—why you could count them on the fingers of one hand—and two of these were dead, and another was so far away in the cattle country of Arizona that he might as well have been so. Jim would have liked well to have gathered this old band of comrades about him and said, "Here, boys, is what I have. It is more than enough for me: it is more than enough for all of us. Let us share it, just as we used to share our bacon or our coffee in the old days, and so we can grow old together in the way that suits us best, the way of the pioneer." As he sat in the cabin now, or stalked the hills with his rifle, this old comradeship took more and more shape from the mists of the past, and there grew up in his breast a sharp craving for old times, old faces, old friends. It was a peculiarity of his nature that his ideas possessed a sort of cumulative force. They gathered added reasons for their carrying out as a rolling snowball gathers snow. Toward the end of that month, he packed a strange old valise with clothes for the journey, strapped on his best six-shooter, put his cabin in order, and rode his horse down to Crooked Horn. There he left the animal with Billy Powers and took the train for Edgemont and thence to Rapid.

He knew that Billy was somewhere in the Hills. At Rapid he learned of that individual's new importance. His heart sank a little at the thought that this prosperity might forfend his own scheme of comradeship,

but nevertheless he took Blair's stage for Copper Creek and Custer.

Near Rockerville the axle gave way. The brake was repaired at a miner's forge with some difficulty, but the job carried on so late into the afternoon that Blair refused to go farther that night, and the party slept at Rockerville. The next morning they pushed on again about daylight, in order that Blair might start back from Custer before noon, thus reducing his delay by a few hours. A half mile below Durand's shack the axle again gave way, this time with a sudden violence that sent flying the baggage which had been piled on top. Jim found his valise in the bushes. The catch had snapped when the bag hit the ground, so that it lay half open; but fortunately its contents had not emptied. Jim closed it with the two end-clasps, and set it by the side of the road. He did not notice that the ivory miniature had dropped out, and now lay face downward at the roots of a *mesquite*.

Blair looked up from his inspection.

"Bad break!" he said, with a string of oaths. "Copper Creek's under a mile ahead. You'll save time by pushin' on afoot. I'll be in as soon as I can get this sulphurated axle tied together with a strap."

"No hurry," replied Jim; "I'll help you."

He began to unhitch the horses while Blair went to borrow an axe of Durand. The driver's intention was to splice the broken axle with a bit of green wood. In a little time, he and the old man returned together.

So Billy found them, straining away with an impromptu crowbar. When he and Jim saw each other, they agreed that they'd be tee-totally chawed up! After a time the stage moved doubtfully on toward Copper

Creek. Billy and Jim went the other way in the buckboard.

Billy explained that he was going to see Jim; and Jim explained that he had come to get Billy. Billy elaborated on the tale of his doings since their last meeting, and easily persuaded Jim, as well as himself, that he was a most wronged individual. To restore his self-respect it only needed a sympathetic listener, so that he could hear the sound of his own voice. For the moment he had doubted himself. Now he saw plainly that he had been misled by false pretences. If he had understood clearly from the beginning the picayune policy expected of him by these stingy Easterners, he would have graduated his scale of expenditures to suit it; but certainly they had implied at least that they intended to get up a good big mine. Served a man right for going in with such sharpers!

Jim merely said that he had a first-rate thing to share with Billy.

It was a pleasant sight, the bearded solemn miner, fairly glowing with pleasure over finding Billy unfortunate and therefore open to his own kind offices; the eager-faced enthusiastic promoter, elated and high-spirited because of the relief of putting quite behind him a colossal failure; because of the privilege of starting again with a clean slate; because of a hundred new and promising schemes for the future. Michaïl Lafond's long planning had availed little, after all. With all his shrewdness he did not see that in the personality of Billy Knapp he was attempting to quench the essence of enthusiasm and hope and faith—inextinguishable fires. That is the American frontiersman.

At Rapid they took the train to Crooked Horn. At

Crooked Horn they reclaimed the horse from Billy Powers. Then they inaugurated the boom. At this very day, December 24th, 1899, they are still living together in the new town of Knapp City, Wyoming, wealthy and respected citizens. And Billy recounts his Copper Creek experiences, generally with tolerance, as an example of the deceit of his fellow-creatures. They were the fruit of eighteen years of planning and waiting and working by a man who thought he could shape greater destinies than his own.

XXXIV

LOVE'S EYES UNBANDAGED

AFTER the vociferating group had made Houston comfortable with the bandages and rough surgery of the frontier, it again took up the discussion of ways and means. It was a tired crowd, haggard from dissipation and want of sleep. And then, too, it was a cross crowd.

A majority were savage. Their passions were aroused to an unreasoning pitch, as is the manner of mobs. To them it was not a question of discussion, but of destruction. They wanted to burn the Company's buildings, and they were so set on it, and so impatient of even a word of opposition, that Lafond began to be a little frightened for his new property. His attempts at dissuasion were everywhere met with rebuff. Finally, on a sudden inspiration, he sprang to his own window ledge and signed his desire to speak.

Such men as Moroney, Kelly, Graham, and Williams, cooler heads, whose stake in the camp's fate was still heavy, succeeded in obtaining a momentary silence.

"Boys," shouted Mike, "I'll pay you myself!"

They paused in good earnest now, to see what these astounding words might signify.

"I'll pay you myself!" repeated Lafond. Then—for he was too shrewd to promise a thing of such moment without giving a plausible reason for it—he went on, "I can't afford to let this camp bust; I got too

much in it. I can afford better that I spend a little to help it along. I don't know what it is that the Company intends; but I will find out; and this I promise to you, if the Company does not pay you, I will make some arrangement for the mine and I will pay you myself!"

Even Graham and Moroney were a little deceived. Both perceived dimly an ulterior motive, but on the surface the offer was generous and there could be no doubt that Lafond's word was perfectly good in such a matter. As for the men, they were more than satisfied.

"But of course," Lafond was saying, "you must not do any injury to the property."

Which went without saying, as every one could see.

Michaïl Lafond ate his breakfast with many long pauses. He had little appetite. His plans had gone well, and yet in their outcome rested a little remnant of the indecisive that annoyed him out of all proportion. Billy had been discharged from his position as superintendent and driven from camp, yet his exit had been melodramatically brilliant and had somehow done much to leave his memory in good odor. He, Lafond, had the promise of the property; but even yet the deeds were in escrow at Rapid. It was forty-five miles to Rapid—ten hours! Much might happen in ten hours. At the thought, which Lafond instinctively paused to note was not in his usual confident manner, he started up and commanded Frosty to harness his team of bays to the buckboard. He would complete the contract before sunset. While the animals were being harnessed, he tried to smoke a pipe. It went out. He attempted to read a paper. He could not.

Finally he went out of doors and strode rapidly up and down. He felt chilled, for the air of the early morning was sharp. He thrust his arm through the open window and took down his old canvas coat from behind the door, and put it on. In spite of its protection he shivered again.

"Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up!" he growled at Frosty. He snapped the lash of his black-snake whip, making the bays dance to the hindrance of Frosty's task. His eye caught the new dance hall.

"She's been worth while, if she never does another thing," he commented to himself, and then realized that he had said it, not because he believed it, but because he wanted to keep his courage up. What was this dread of the intangible? He could not understand it. "Getting too old to sit up all night," he explained it to himself.

His thoughts went back to the night. It had left with him an impression of being unsatisfactory. Why should it? There was something about the girl, he did not recall exactly what. Oh yes, Cheyenne Harry! That affair had balked. Well, it did not much matter: that was a detail. Now that the dance hall was up, the girl could be forced to take her place. Lafond told himself that he was a little tired of finesse and delicate planning—too tired to undertake another long campaign of the kind merely for the satisfaction to be found in the process. Besides, in this case it was not necessary. He would settle the affair now, get it off his mind.

He strode over to the girl's shack and pushed open the door. She was lying flat on her face, fully dressed as in her first transport of shame, but she had now

fallen into a light sleep. At the creak of the door, however, she looked up, her eyes red with crying.

"That was a hell of a performance last night," said Lafond brutally, "and it don't go again."

He had never spoken to her so before.

She sat upright on the bed and stared at him, clasping one hand near her throat.

"That ain't what you're here for," continued Mike. "There'll be another dance Saturday night, and you be on hand and stay on hand. That's your job now—understand?"

A slow comprehension of his meaning crept into her eyes, and she covered them with her hands. The half-breed stood in the doorway coiling and uncoiling the lash of his whip. He wanted some indication of how she was going to take it.

"Understand?" he repeated.

She merely shuddered.

"Damn it! can't you answer?" he cried impatiently. "What do you think I've raised you for anyway? You're none of my breed. Answer, you——," and he spat out an epithet.

She lowered her hands and looked at him again with wide-open eyes from which all expression had faded. This stony silence irritated Lafond.

"You've had your head long enough. Now you're going to show what you're made for. Understand? Great God!" he cried, "you've got a tongue, haven't you? Why don't you answer when I ask you a question?" In one of the sudden Latin gusts of passion, which generally he held so well in control, Lafond lashed her across the breast with his black-snake whip. Almost before the impulse had quitted his brain he

regretted it, for her scream would bring out the camp, and Lafond could see the awkwardness of an explanation. It was better to break her in gradually. To his relief, she did not cry out, but merely shivered pitifully and closed her eyes.

"That's what you'll get if you don't toe the mark," threatened Lafond, only too glad to avoid a scene. He slouched out of the door, climbed into his light wagon shaking his heavy head sullenly, and drove away in the direction of Rapid.

After he had gone and the sound of his wheels had died away, the girl arose staggeringly from her bed. The bright world had crumbled. For the first time in her young existence her thoughts turned to the vague conception of a higher Being which she had built, Heaven knows how, from materials gathered, Heaven knows where.

"God, God, God!" she cried, "I thought this was a happy world where people laughed. I did not know there was so much sorrow in the world. You did not make the world to be sorrowful, did you, God?"

She was almost blind. She knew that she must kill herself: that alone was clear. It was that or the dance hall. She was to be like Bismarck Anne. And she realized in a moment that she knew Black Mike, his iron will and his cruel heart; and she was afraid of him, deadly afraid. She began to grope about the room. There was a dim square: that must be the window. Her hands passed fumblingly over the table, just missing the long sewing scissors. Nothing there. Quick, quick, he might come back! She almost fell over the cloak, which had fallen to the floor, and was now entangled about her feet. There was another

square of light: it must be the door. She stumbled out into a glare of merciless sunshine that filled her brain and beat on the walls of her understanding until she covered her eyes, and still stumbled on. She thought she heard men shouting. She was not sure.

From his work of sweeping out the stale saloon, Frosty had seen her. She was a strange sight, her hair half down, her face white and drawn, her step so uncertain. Frosty was very fond of her in his stupid silent way. He yelled and ran toward her.

In this day of excitement, a cry brought a dozen heads to a dozen windows and doors. In a moment the girl was surrounded. The men were puzzled. "Plain case of bug-juice," said one, a little sorrowfully.

She felt someone trying gently to lead her somewhere, but she resisted, crying "Let me go, let me go. I want to get to the big rock."

Graham pushed his way anxiously into the group. He had not been able to bring himself to attend the dance the evening before, but he had been told the details, and up to now had felt rather relieved than otherwise at the turn affairs had taken.

"Why do you want to go to the big rock, Molly?" he asked gently.

At the sound of his voice she began to cry a little. "It is so high up there, so high," she said over and over.

"Of course it's high, Molly, very high; but don't you think you'd better wait until to-morrow?"

The men stood about with awe-stricken faces. They saw now that there was more in this than they had at first supposed. "Nutty," they whispered to each other in undertones.

"Such a long way down, a long way down," went on the girl. "I could jump from there very easily; such a long way down!"

Graham took her quietly by the shoulders.

"Listen, Molly, it's I, Jack Graham."

"Yes, Jack."

"And I want you to do just as I say. Will you do it?"

"Yes, Jack."

"I want you to go with me. Do you trust me, Molly?"

She began to sob violently, almost convulsively, dabbing uncertainly at her eyes.

"What is it, Jack? What am I doing here?"

"Nothing; it's all right. Will you come with me? Ah, that's better."

She looked about her with intelligence.

"What is it, boys? How did I come here?" Her glance wandered past them to the dance hall, and she turned away suddenly. "Ah! I remember!" The strained look began to come back into her face.

"Here, here, Molly!" cried Graham in alarm, "that won't do! Here, you must do just exactly as I say. You must come with me now, and get something to eat and some sleep. Don't you trust me, Molly?"

He looked steadily into her eyes, his brow contorted with anxiety.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," she cried suddenly, "whom else could I trust but you? You have been the only man whom I could have trusted from the very first, the only man I should have trusted. I see that now. I have known it all the while, but I would not acknowledge it."

"Will you go with me then, Molly?" asked Graham again.

This time it was she who raised her hands to his shoulders. "Jack," said she solemnly, "a few minutes ago I was on the point of killing myself because I saw nothing but death or that dance hall before me. I had forgotten. I will never do so again. I will go with you now, Jack, wherever you want me to; and I will go with you, Jack, forever, to the end of the world."

She leaned suddenly forward and kissed him, and then as suddenly fell to weeping again, with great sobs that shook her slender body cruelly.

Never was a stranger love scene; never was one more in keeping with the wayward, capricious, yet intrinsically sterling character of Molly Lafond. She did not understand it; but she felt to her inmost soul that it was real; and that if she did not love Jack Graham now, at least she respected him above all men and above herself, and that her affection for him would never diminish, but rather increase as the time went on. And this the event proved to be true. Nor did Graham understand, but he too felt the sincerity of it. As for the men before whose audience the curious drama had been enacted, they understood still less.

But it was very simple after all.

In her nature, as in all other natures, two forces had struggled for the mastery. With her they happened to be called heredity, or the East; and education, or the West. Her training, her environment, her mental atmosphere had powerfully affected her general conduct of life; but in the great crisis her deeper nature had spoken, and she had obeyed.

XXXV

OUT OF THE PAST

MICHAIL LAFOND drove on slowly down the valley of Copper Creek, although, if he intended to reach Rapid before dark, there would seem to be every reason for haste.

He usually conducted his affairs so carefully, so shrewdly, so calculatingly. How had he happened to give way so to an impulse? He regretted lashing the girl with his whip, because he felt that it was unnecessary. Doing unnecessary evil had always been against Lafond's principles. He considered it bad luck, and somehow that spectre of bad luck seemed to be coming very close. He had lost confidence. Therefore he made mistakes.

Just outside of town he encountered Blair's stage crawling along on a mended axle. Naturally both vehicles pulled up. After explanations of the accident, Blair remarked casually—

"Struck Billy down the road a piece."

"Yes," said Mike, "he left this morning."

"Almighty lucky happen-so for him, 'cause I had an old codger aboard that was just on his way to visit Billy. Nice old cuss, too. Name Buckley, or Bulkley, or something like that. Come from out Wyoming way."

Lafond clamped on his brake again.

"Yes," said he, "I used to know him. He went off with Billy, you say?"

"Yes, bag *an'* baggage."

"Goin' to Rapid?"

"Near as I could make out," said Blair. "They reversed the proposition on the spot. Place of him a visitin' of Billy, Billy he aims to visit him. Things movin' at camp?"

"They'll tell you up there," replied Lafond and drove on.

What a fiendish stroke of luck! This one man in all the West who knew of the affair at Spanish Gulch in the seventies, who would remember the doctor's wife, who would recognize the strong resemblance of her daughter to her, who might stir up that dust of the past which Lafond had so carefully laid—that he should come just at this time! To be sure, there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to implicate him—Lafond. But Buckley was a tenacious sort of individual; he would insist on investigating. That would mean explanations by Lafond, a detailed account. The details would have to be invented. And then a chill struck his heart as he realized that he could not recall all the story he had told the Indian agent when he had left the little girl in his charge!

He pulled his horses down to a walk and set himself to thinking earnestly. He went over in sequence, as nearly as he could remember them, every word and action, from his meeting with Durand to his departure from the agency. It was no use. Even at the time, he had invented the story lightly, without much thought of its importance except as a temporary expedient. Now the matter had quite escaped him. Jim Buckley's return West, which had before seemed merely fortunate, he saw now had been providential. It was

a narrow escape. He must visit the agent as soon as possible, for the purpose of refreshing his memory.

He came to Durand's cabin. The old man stood near the doorway examining something which he held flat in the palm of his hand. At his feet, Jacques, the little raccoon, was curled up in a bright-eyed ball of fur, enjoying the early sun. Out behind the cabin, Isabeau, the tasselled lynx, stepped lightly to and fro along the length of his chain; and the great Pantalon sat drolly on his shaggy haunches sniffing the air. Lafond stopped. He felt he must talk to some one or give way to this incomprehensible impulse to shriek aloud.

They exchanged greetings. At once Lafond saw something suspicious in the old man's attitude. He was preternaturally grave. He seemed to be thinking of something behind his actual speech.

"I've something to show you, Lafond," he remarked after a little. "It's very queer," and with what Lafond saw at once to be an accusing motion he held before the latter's eyes the little ivory miniature of Prue Welch.

He had found it under a *mesquite* bush. Ever since he had been struggling vainly to place the familiarity of the features. He had not seen enough of the girl at the camp to be able to do so definitely, but he had succeeded in bringing his mind almost to the point of a recognition which was continually just escaping him.

Lafond started violently, and stared at the portrait.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Durand. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

On the instant Lafond recovered his self-possession. He glanced with side-long evil look at the old man.

"Nothing," said he briefly.

It was evident that the naturalist was trying to trap him.

"Where have you seen her before?" asked the latter, returning to the portrait. "She is old-fashioned —must have had that painted fifteen or twenty years ago—and yet I've seen her recently."

Lafond stiffly descended from the vehicle, both hands thrust deep into the pockets of his canvas coat, and peered over the old man's shoulder.

"Here, Lafond," the latter was saying, "you know more about this than I do——" He meant that the half-breed possessed a wider circle of acquaintances. At his words Lafond drew an ivory-handled clasp-knife from the pocket of his canvas coat, opened it in two lightning motions and stabbed the old man deeply in the back. The latter stumbled forward, half turning as he fell. Lafond plunged his blade wickedly into Durand's throat, where it stuck, twisting out of the murderer's hands. The victim writhed twice, gasped, and died.

Black Mike stood over the body for a moment, panting. He stooped to recover the knife. On its ivory handle he read the words "William Knapp," on which he remembered, and left it where it was. Then he climbed into his wagon and insanely lashed his horses into a frantic run.

The little furry 'coon approached its master bristling. It dabbled its black paws, almost human, in the blood that stood on the threshold, and then, frothing at the muzzle, it scrambled into the house and up a high bookshelf, where it crouched, its eyes like coals of green fire.

On the hillside opposite a white-faced little boy rose from behind a *mesquite* clasping the neck of a homely dog. He ran at once to town, where he burst in on Moroney, crying, " Pop, pop, Black Mike's gone and killed old Bugchaser with a knife," after which he began to cry hysterically. It took time for the camp to arouse, to dress, to hear the tale, to believe, to visit the scene of the deed, to believe again after finding Billy's knife, to discuss, to decide, and finally to saddle horses and depart, puzzled, on the trail of Lafond. It had a rope. But it also wanted to hear more about it. Therefore its speed was not as rapid as it might have been, had a horse thief, for instance, been the object of pursuit.

So Lafond, after his first impulse to get away from the scene of his deed had spent itself, jogged along unmolested toward Rapid. His brain was working like lightning, but always on one line. He saw himself alone, standing opposed to this huge black Bad-luck. Everything was against him. But they couldn't get him down. He was Man-who-speaks-Medicine, the Sioux; he was Lafond, the half-breed; he was Black Mike, the pioneer. Let them come on! They thought they could corner him. He would show them. One was gone. There remained the other two. Lafond's mind saw red; he was set on murder. No consideration of reason, probability, or common sense obtruded itself athwart his plan. He could perceive one fact—that three men knew his secret, of whom one was dead and the other two were living. Why Knapp and Buckley should have told Durand; what they expected to gain by going to Rapid; or what benefit the naturalist imagined could accrue to him from his insinuating the

state of affairs to the half-breed, the latter did not inquire. He only knew that he wanted to catch Knapp's buckboard before it had left the pine belt. Ambush would then be easier. He lashed his horses unmercifully.

Rockerville told him the two men had passed through not half an hour before, and wondered at the wildness of his eye.

That was well. They could not escape him now, for their wagon was heavily loaded, and they were travelling leisurely, having no reason for haste. Remembering appearances, he told Rockerville that it did not much matter, he would not try to catch up; and then drove back toward Copper Creek, only to make a détour by a wood road into the Rapid trail again. As he approached the foothills, he could hear occasionally the creak of a brake below him, by which he knew that he was drawing near. He slowed up at once, for he knew of a short cut a mile or so ahead, which the prospectors would not attempt because of their heavy load, but by which he could come out ahead of his victims. Then he would lie in wait. The short cut in question dipped steeply down into the bed of a creek, and as steeply up on the other side; while the main stage-road made a long horseshoe curve around the head of the cañon. Lafond decided to drive rapidly down, to leave his team in the creek bottom, and to climb on foot to the level of the main road on the other side. In the meantime he drew as near to the other wagon as he could without being seen. The minutes seemed to drag.

At last he discerned the dimly blazed trail, rocky and dangerous enough, which dropped sheer away into

the underbrush below. He locked the brakes and turned sharply down to the right. The descent was hazardous, bumpy, exceedingly noisy. For this reason it was not until he had reached the level ground at the bottom of the cañon and the clash of iron tire against stone had ceased, that he became aware the ravine was already occupied. A sound of voices and laughter floated up through the thin screen of leaves. As the half-breed's vehicle pushed out toward the creek itself, he saw that he had unwittingly stumbled on a camp of Indians up in the Hills on one of their annual jaunts after teepee poles.

Once a year they make these excursions. The whole band—men, women, children, ponies, dogs, and household goods—goes along. It is an outing. The women fell and strip the long slender saplings. The men loaf lazily in front of their temporary shelters or ride about the Hills to the various camps, giving war dances for nickels and silver pieces. The occasion is eminently peaceful.

Of such a nature was the gathering which Michaïl Lafond came upon in the level of the little cañon. The wigwams had been pitched either side of the old overgrown road. Children had cut away the slight underbrush to clear a round smooth park of perhaps thirty yards diameter, in the circumference of which were crowded the persons and household belongings of four score people. Near the centre stood the chief's lodge distinguished by a shield and spear. The whole was a facsimile of a plains camp, except that here the whole affair was in miniature—little wigwams, little kettle-tripods, little space—for the camp was but temporary. Perhaps a score of men were idling about, dressed in

blue overalls and old flannel shirts. Moccasins and no hats left still a slight flavor of savagery. The women were clothed for the most part in dirty calico prints. The children had on just nothing at all.

Lafond cursed a little excitedly as he became aware of this not unpicturesque gathering. It was plainly out of the question to leave his horses and wagon in the creek bottom as he had intended; and it was now equally impossible to waylay the prospectors at the top of the grade. A shot would bring out the entire band. The situation was much complicated, for just beyond lay the rolling treeless foothills. More bad luck!

Still the half-breed remembered it was yet many miles to Rapid; and an ambush would not be impossible in some one of the numerous gullies that seamed the foothills. He must hurry his tired horses up the steep slope in order to emerge on the main road ahead of Knapp and Buckley.

"How!" said the nearest warrior, raising his hand palm outward.

"How!" replied Lafond gravely.

He drove on through the half-obliterated road, responding to the conventional salutations of those on the right and on the left. Near the further side of the little clearing, a tiny copper-colored boy rose from the grass and scurried across in front of the horses, so near that Lafond had to pull up sharply to keep from running over him. An old woman, evidently its nurse, hurried to catch him. When she came to the road, however, she stopped short, and stared at Black Mike wildly, and began to scream out in the language of the Brulé Sioux.

"'Tis he, the Defiler! 'Tis he!"

She was an unkempt, wild old hag, and Lafond thought her mad. Her face was lined deeply, as only an Indian's face ever is; a few ragged wisps of gray hair fell over her eyes; and her skinny arm showed that she was thin almost to emaciation.

At her scream a warrior arose before the chief's lodge and approached. From all directions the other warriors gathered. Two of the younger men had already taken the horses by the bits. Lafond did not understand it, and was about to expostulate vigorously against what he thought was intended robbery until he saw the face of the chieftain, who now drew near. Then he turned cold to the marrow.

The chief looked him in the face for almost a minute.

"It is not so," he said quietly.

The hag had ceased her cries when the two young men had grasped the horses' bits.

"It is so, O Lone Wolf," she replied with respect. "The form is changed by the hand of Manitou, but the spirit is the same, and I know it in his eyes. It is the Defiler."

"Let Rippling Water be sought," responded the savage, still without excitement.

About him the old-time dignity clung as a mantle. To any one in a less desperate situation than Michaïl Lafond there would have been something strangely incongruous and a little pathetic in this contrast between the manner of the old wild plains savage and the habit of the modern ward of the government. Even he was cool enough to see that the once powerful tribe had sadly shrunk in numbers and in wealth.

After a moment the woman called by the name of

Rippling Water appeared from a distance, where she had been cutting birch bark. In the syllables of the beautiful name Lafond had recognized that of the second of his Indian wives; in the prematurely aged withered squaw who now approached he recognized nothing.

"My daughter," said Lone Wolf, "look upon this man. Have you seen him ever?"

She peered at him a moment through short-sighted eyes.

"I have lain on his bosom," she answered simply.

"It is——?"

"It is the Defiler," she replied.

XXXVI

UNDER THE ETERNAL STARS

AFTER the massacre at the battle of the Little Big Horn, a vast number of Indian refugees fled over the borders into Canada. There they dwelt, drawing three pounds of beef a day from arbitrary uniformed individuals, who were strangely lacking in sympathy, and very observant of the few rules and regulations which a mysterious White Mother over the sea had seen fit to impose. Three pounds of meat a day is not much. Still it is enough to get along on, and with the necessity, and indeed, the opportunity of the chase gone, the bucks were able to wax lazy, drunken, and generally shiftless to their hearts' content. All this was frowned on by the uniformed individuals, but opportunities were not far to seek.

There has never been a nation more warlike, brave, and hardy than the Sioux in its native environment of war and hunting. These two furnished every point of leverage—physical, moral, intellectual—which the savage required to lift him to the level of his greatest efficiency. From the buffalo itself the Sioux family obtained its supply of wigwams, robes, food, fuel, light, harness, bow-strings, instruments of industry—in fact almost every article of necessity or luxury appertaining to its everyday life. From the chase of the animal the young Dacotah learned to ride, to shoot, to risk his life. And then in his constant strife with his neighbors, the Blackfeet or the Crows or the Pawnees, he

was forced, if he would survive, to develop to the last degree his cunning, his observation, his strategy, his resourcefulness, his patience, his power to endure, his personal courage. Habituated to these two, the chase and war, from his early youth, he came at last to be the coolest, most dangerous warrior of the plains. He could ride anything, bareback, in any position. With his short, powerful bow he could launch a half-dozen arrows into the air before the first reached the ground, or could drive one of his shafts quite through the body of a buffalo. When necessity required, he was brave to the point of recklessness; but again, when expediency advised, he could worm his way for miles through the scantiest cover, flat on his face, by the laborious use alone of his elbows and toes. He could read a whole history in a trail which another might not even distinguish. He could sit absolutely motionless for hours in the hottest sun or the bitterest cold. And he could bear, as he was often called upon to do, the severest physical pain without a quiver of the eyelid.

But when the buffalo vanished, the Sioux passed the meridian of his powers. No other means of subsistence offered. He was forced to plunder, or go to the reservation for Government beef. Thence came much whisky and much loafing. The new young man had not the training of his father. So, in a little, the Teton nation was subdued and brought to reservations, and herded in an overall-plug-hat-blanket-wearing multitude, even now but half-tamed, and fiercely instinct with hereditary ferocity and resourcefulness. Other Indians go to Carlisle, learn to plough, and become at least partially civilized. The Sioux, fierce, hawk-eyed, wide-nostrilled, sits in solitary dignity before his lodge,

brooding. Occasionally he has to be rounded up with a Gatling, as witness Wounded Knee. I have never been able to envy the agents of Dakota reservations.

When the statute of limitations ran out, or whatever mysterious time-limit the Government puts on its displeasure against Indian murderers, Sitting Bull and a horde of his fellow-warriors came back. Sitting Bull joined Buffalo Bill's show, where he had a good time until he began ghost-dancing and was killed in the Wounded Knee campaign. But some, Lone Wolf's band among them, remained in Canada. They had various reasons for doing so.

Lone Wolf stayed because he was in hard luck. He had barely settled down in his new home before the great Manitou had seen fit to strike his children with the Spotted Sickness. When finally the last case had been buried hastily, and its clothes and belongings burned under the distant eye of the uniformed man, the formerly powerful band found itself reduced by almost half. By dint of sitting innumerable days naked in a circle on the prairie and beating a tom-tom until the agent prayed for rain, the survivors managed to secure for themselves immunity from the Spotted Sickness at least. Then some of the ponies were stolen. Then a schism occurred in the community; and Three Knives took with him a dozen families and established a new clan within plain sight of the old. Lone Wolf was powerless because of the uniformed individual, who frowned on the Indian idea of patriarchal chastisement. A very young man of the band killed the agent, hoping thus to earn praise, but almost before the embers were cold and before the scalp of Three Knives had clotted dry, there appeared an astounding number

of uniforms, who promptly decimated Lone Wolf's warriors and took away all their arms. Lone Wolf discovered that these uniformed men were in reality nothing but soldiers—a disgusting fact which he had not before suspected. They hung six of his young men, and that night a number of things happened, such as the unprovoked fall of Lone Wolf's standard from over his lodge, which showed plainly that Gitche Manitou was still angry.

Lone Wolf gathered his remnants about him and journeyed south to Spotted Tail.

There he enjoyed the discontented tranquillity of a United States reservation, with occasional privileges if he was good.

Lone Wolf had gone into the north country at the head of three hundred efficient fighting men, well armed with rifles, rich in ammunition, ponies, and the luxuries of daily existence. He came back as the nominal chief of thirty-five warriors, with few firearms, and less wealth. Counting in the women, children, and old men, his original band had numbered nearly a thousand souls—a large camp even for the old days. Now there remained barely a tenth of that number.

Misfortunes such as these must have a reason. Gitche Manitou is stern, but he is not unjust. Everybody knows that. And the reason Lone Wolf's band was so afflicted, Big Thunder, the medicine man, had discovered, lay in the fact that the defiling of the tribe's token, after the Little Big Horn, had been done by a member of the tribe itself. Until the culprit should be brought to justice the wrath of Gitche Manitou would continue to be visited impartially on the entire band.

The recognition of Rippling Water made a profound

impression on those standing about. There flashed into Lone Wolf's eagle face a gleam of satisfaction so intense that Black Mike started. He had not the remotest notion that he was in any actual danger, for his dealings with the tribe in those old times when he had been a member of it had always been rather to its advantage than to his own. That is was unfriendly to him because of his unceremonious desertion of it, he did not doubt. Nor did he hope to escape a typical Indian tirade from the two old hags who, so short a time ago, had been his not unattractive young wives. But beyond this, and perhaps—as he glanced over the motley indications of their poverty—the promise of gifts, he anticipated nothing more serious in the end than a delay. A delay, however, was what he could not at present afford.

"Ah, well," he acknowledged in the Indian tongue, "I am he, Man-who-speaks-Medicine. You have known me. It is I. It is many moons that I have not seen my brothers, but I have accomplished many things, and I have gathered gifts for my brothers which will rejoice their hearts. I go to the lodges of the white men near Swift-water now, and I haste; so I cannot linger to clasp my brothers' hands; but to-morrow I return bearing the gifts."

He took up his reins with all confidence, for in those days no one was afraid of Indians—at least when they were accompanied by their women and children. The two bucks at the horses' heads did not move, however; and at a signal from Lone Wolf three others leaped lightly into the wagon-body behind the half-breed and pinned his arms to his sides. So suddenly was it done that Lafond could not even struggle.

His captors tied his elbows together at the back and lifted him to the ground, where a number of others hustled him into a wigwam, and after tying his feet left him lying on the ground. In a moment he heard the faint sound of wheels somewhere above him, by which he knew that Billy Knapp and Buckley were passing the point of his intended ambush. He drew a deep breath and shouted. Instantly two young Sioux ran in and threw a blanket over his head, nearly smothering him. The sound of the wheels died into distance.

After perhaps two hours he heard the hoof-beats of a large party of horsemen. They, too, died away. The men composing the party were looking for him, Michaïl Lafond, but this he did not know. He tried to distinguish from the noises just outside what was taking place in the little camp, but he could not.

At the end of another half-hour the two young men who had been appointed as his guards led him out to a horse, on which, after his feet had been untied, he was compelled to mount. He asked them questions, to which they vouchsafed no reply. Looking about him curiously, he saw that the camp had been struck. The long teepee poles, bound on each side of the ponies, trailed their ends on the ground, and on the litters thus formed, the skins of the lodges, all the household utensils, and many of the younger children had been placed. Squaws bestrode the little animals. The warriors, ridiculously incongruous in their overalls and flannel shirts, sat motionless on their mounts. Lafond recognized his own team, but could not discover either his wagon or the harness. These had been dragged away into the bushes and left, for very good reasons.

The cavalcade took its way directly down the narrow, overgrown little cañon, riding in single file. Lafond could not understand this. The road above would have been much easier.

After an hour's hard work in dodging obstructions, getting around fallen trees or between standing timber, the party emerged on the broad, rolling foothills, grass-covered and bare of trees. Here Lone Wolf led the way south-east for several miles, and finally came to a halt on the brow of a round hill of gentle descent. The band at once dismounted. A number of the squaws deftly relieved the ponies of their burdens, and the younger boys led them away to the bottom-lands for pasture. The women then began without delay to erect the lodges in a wide circle surrounding the brow of the hill, so arranging them that the flaps or doorways opened into the common centre. After this had been done, they built in the middle of the circle a huge fire of wood brought from the Hills, but did not light it as yet. Then all silently disappeared to the bottom-lands, where they made little fires and set about supper.

Before each lodge a warrior established himself, crosslegged, and began to smoke. When the sun dipped behind the Hills and threw their long shadows silently out across to the Bad Lands, the chill of twilight struck in, and so the Indians wrapped themselves closely in their blankets. As by a stroke of enchantment, with the concealment of the shirts and overalls, the Past returned. Against the sky of evening, the silhouettes of the pointed wigwams and the suggestion of the shrouded warriors smoking solemnly, silently, their pipes, all belonged to the nomadic age before such men as Michaïl Lafond had " civilized " the country.

After a time they rose and departed silently to the bottom-land for a while, leaving Lafond in charge of the two young men. They had gone to eat their suppers. The half-breed had not tasted food since the early morning, nor slept for thirty odd hours.

The stars came out one by one, and the stillness of that great inland sea men call the prairies fell on the world. Such occasional sounds as rose from the creek bottom seemed but to emphasize the peace. And then suddenly, from the shadows somewhere, without disturbance, the blanketed figures appeared and took their places again. A squaw came bearing a torch, and lit the fire in the centre of the circle, and there sprang up a broad shaft of light which drew about the little scene a great canopy of imminent blackness. From hand to hand passed a great red-stone calumet or pipe. Each warrior puffed at it twice and passed it to his neighbor. It was not offered to Michaïl Lafond, whose bonds had now been loosened.

After each of the seated warriors had taken his part in this ceremony, and the pipe had completed the circle to Lone Wolf, that chief arose, throwing back his blanket from his shoulders.

With a sudden chill of fear, Michaïl Lafond saw that he was to assist at a state council of the sort held only when the tribe is to sit in judgment on one of its own number.

The savage was naked to the waist. In his hair, worn loose and unbraided after the Sioux fashion, three eagle feathers with white tips were thrust slantwise across the back of his head; and under its heavy mass his fierce bright eyes and hawk face gleamed impressively. About his neck hung a fringe of bears' claws,

from which depended a round silver medal. Now as he stood there—the lithe strength of his bronze torso revealed one arm clasping the blanket about his waist, the other holding loosely at his side the feather-bedecked calumet of sandstone—the stigma of sordidness and drunkenness and squalor seemed to fall away, so that the spectator would have seen in this group of silent men under the silent western heavens only the pomp and pride of a great and savage people in the zenith of its power.

Lone Wolf stood for the space of several minutes without a sign. Then with a magnificently sweeping gesture he held the calumet aloft and began to speak.

At first his voice was low and monotonous, but as his speech continued it took on more color, until at the close it responded in modulation to every flash of his eye. He began with a recital of the tribe's ancient glory, dwelling rather on concrete examples than on broader generalities. He numbered its warriors, its ponies, its arms, and lodges. He told of the beauty of its women and the greatness of its men, whom he ran over by name. He told of its deeds in war, enumerating the enemies it had struck, the ponies it had stolen, the stratagems it had conceived and carried out. And then he swept his arm and the feather-fluttering calumet abroad as he described the boundless extent of the hunting grounds over which it had used to roam. As he continued, the warriors' expressive eyes brightened and flashed with pride, though they moved not one muscle of their faces or bodies. Beyond the circle could be dimly descried another not less interested audience of women and older children.

"These and more were ours!" cried Lone Wolf,

" these and many more. The favor of Gitche Manitou was ours and the riches of the world. Where are they now?" With an indescribably graceful gesture the orator stooped to the ground and grasped a handful of the loose dry earth. " Gone!" he said solemnly, letting the sand fall from his outstretched suddenly opened palm.

Then, without pause or transition, he began, in equally vivid objective language, to detail the tribe's misery and poverty of to-day. He recounted its disasters, just as a moment before he had recounted its victories. He told of the Spotted Sickness, the dividing of forces, the battle with the red coats, all the long series of oppressions great and little which had brought them to their present condition. He counted over by name the present members, to show how their numbers had shrunken, and to each name he added others of those who had gone before. So real was the picture that the orator himself faltered, while from outside the circle rose for a single instant a long trembling wail. The warriors had half covered their faces with the folds of their blankets.

" Thus our glory went and our young men are seen no longer on the war path, but only in the white men's towns. And yet our fathers were brave before us and we have struck well in our time. Why is this so? Why has Gitche Manitou veiled his face from his children?"

Leaving the question unanswered, Lone Wolf unexpectedly took up Lafond's connection with the tribe. In the recounting of this, too, he held to the greatest minuteness of detail, showing plainly the half-breed's rise from despised squaw man to a person of influence in the councils. He gave the half-breed full credit for

all he did. He even went out of his way to show that to Lafond was due much of the power that had so distinguished the Brulé Sioux among the other tribes. He described again briefly that power, and told of the battle of the Little Big Horn. He dwelt on that as to some extent the culmination of the tribe's glory. It was the last and greatest of its exploits. After it misfortune commenced. Gitche Manitou that day veiled his face.

"And he turned his hand against the totem of the Turtle," said Lone Wolf impressively, "because one of its children had committed a sacrilege. The very night of that great victory, a brave from among us arose and took the sacred totem, the great Turtle, from the lodge of his chief, and slew Buffalo Voice, the medicine man favored of Gitche Manitou, and defiled the totem.

"From that time Gitche Manitou has frowned upon his children. From that time misfortune has visited the tribe of Lone Wolf. From that time the man who did these things has lost his old warrior name and has been known as the Defiler."

He paused and looked about the circle until his eye rested on Lafond. With a sudden fierce enmity he stretched his arm toward the captive.

"That is he," he concluded impressively; "and it has been revealed by Big Thunder that never will Gitche Manitou smile on his children until the Defiler dies!"

XXXVII

ASHES

A LIGHT night wind had arisen from the lower prairie, and occasionally puffed a stray wisp of smoke or heat across the westernmost curve of the circle. Hot sparks shot up in the air swiftly, paused, and floated dying down the wind. Above, occasionally, the clear stars peeped in through the canopy of blackness which the firelight so jealously guarded. There was a perceptible chill in the air. As the long speech continued and drew to a close, the half-breed, seated on the prairie side of the fire, shivered convulsively from time to time, for he was now almost exhausted by excitement and lack of sleep and food. At first he had submitted to the trial, if so it might be called, unwillingly enough, to tell the truth, but without a suspicion that it could result in anything more serious than a fine for desertion. It might almost be looked upon as a ransom, and this he was willing to pay. His principal emotion had been that of frantic chafing because, for the present, Jim Buckley and Billy Knapp were free to make trouble for him. He had no doubt they would do so, although he did not know exactly how they would go at it.

As Lone Wolf so dramatically outlined the grounds of his accusation, however, Lafond really began to see the face of fear. He gathered that the very night he had chosen to quit the tribe, some one had killed the tribe's medicine man and defiled the totem in a way

not to be mentioned here. This is with Indians the Unforgiveable Sin. Suspicion had naturally coupled the sacrilege with his own coincidental disappearance. Probably even at the time no one had doubted his guilt or had suspected any other cause for his desertion. The real criminal had been able easily to cover his trail; and now, so many years would have hardened even a slight suspicion, let alone a positive certainty, into conviction absolute. Lafond saw that his chances were desperate, and yet so suddenly was the knowledge forced upon him that he could hardly realize it. But a few hours before, he had held in the hollow of his hand more power than any other one man in the territory. Now he was in danger of his life.

He knew well enough that his only chance lay in keeping cool. He must not interrupt the orator with denials. He must try to make his eloquence tell.

Lone Wolf ceased abruptly, drew his blanket about his shoulders and sat down. Two squaws noiselessly entered the circle, bearing wood for the fire. After they had withdrawn, Lafond rose to his feet.

He was at once uncomfortably conscious of the circle of snake eyes. It was for him the predominant note in the scene.

He began haltingly, partly because he did not know what to say, partly because long disuse had impaired his fluency in the Indian tongue. But in a moment, as he began to realize that he was now in the act of making the only plea for his life which his captors would permit him, his speech quickened until it was as rapid as that of Lone Wolf himself.

It was a masterly effort, for Lafond had not lost the old eloquence which had earned him the name of

"Man-who-speaks-Medicine." He reviewed, as had Lone Wolf, his services to the tribe. He did it modestly, stating plainly the facts and leaving the savages to draw their own conclusions. He showed further that in so bending his efforts to the tribe's betterment, he had been actuated by no selfish motives, in proof of which proposition he enumerated one by one the various opportunities he had let pass of decamping enriched beyond any one warrior's dreams of wealth; to which proposition he further pointed out as a corollary that he had in reality departed with but his own weapons and the clothes on his back. This made an impression. Having thus established his disinterestedness as regards his services to the tribe, he went on further to show that these argued, furthermore, an intense personal interest in its welfare. He loved his people. He challenged them to cite one of his deeds which would bear the contrary construction.

And then, with a boldness that almost amounted to genius, he drew before them vividly that night on the battlefield when he had so long contemplated the fallen white chief, and he detailed to them the reasons he had then for believing the Indians' warlike power was from that moment doomed to wane.

"I saw these things," he said, "as one to whom Gitche Manitou had spoken, and I knew they were true. But my brothers were victorious; they saw the blue coats scattered as the dust is scattered by the wind. My words would have been as the water that slips away or the cloud that vanishes in the heavens. If I had told my brothers these things, they would not have believed. You, Spotted Dog; you, Firebrand; even you, Lone Wolf, would not have believed. Look well

within your hearts and acknowledge that I speak words of truth. Then you would have cast me out as one with forked tongue."

Such being the case, Lafond argued that, inasmuch as he could do nothing for his people by sharing their disgrace, he had left them. "But only for a season," he explained. "You are warriors: I am a man of craft. When your bows are broken and your arrows lost, then must I take my weapons and strive as I can. I went forth to fight for my brothers. Behold me; I have fought and I have won. I am rich. My brothers are to share my riches. Now I can return to the lodges of my brothers as one coming from a far war trail, bringing the ponies and scalps of the enemies my hand has struck."

Then suddenly the speaker took up the question of the crime itself. He dilated on it with horror. He acknowledged no excuse for it. But, he asked them, why should he have committed it? He showed them that he could have had no motive for such a wanton insult. And, most ingenious of all, he pointed out that if, as Lone Wolf had supposed, the tribe's misfortunes had arisen because of Gitche Manitou's wrath over this terrible crime, then that wrath and those misfortunes would indubitably have been visited on him, the accused, with the rest; for he was a member of the tribe, and according to the accusation the guiltiest of them all. Such was not the case. On the contrary he had prospered.

In conclusion he believed he could direct suspicion to the right channel. From his wonderful past knowledge of inter-tribal and individual jealousies, he rapidly constructed a plausible theory.

His defence, as he could observe, made a profound impression. The savages sat silent and thoughtful while the minutes slipped by, and the wavering light from the central fire alternately illuminated and threw into shadow the strong bronze of their faces. The argument was sophistical enough, but for two reasons it carried conviction. In the first place, the half-breed was pleading for his very life; in the second place, he was in reality absolutely innocent as to the main facts. Therefore he had faith and earnestness—two great qualities. His only misfortune was, that the exigencies of the situation demanded that in the web of truth one falsehood should be woven.

Beyond the circle of light the dim forms of the women and children showed faintly against the dimmer background of the sea-like prairie. They had followed with great attention the deliberations before them, but in silence and with decorum, as is proper in such cases. Now suddenly one of them slipped forward through the circle before her companions or the warriors between whom she passed could detain her. Before the fire she turned and faced Lone Wolf. It was the old hag who had first recognized Lafond.

The warriors looked on her in cold surprise. Such a thing as a woman intruding on a council was unheard of, unthinkable, punishable by almost any penalty.

"My daughter has been deceived," said Lone Wolf gravely. "This is not a gathering of the women. She must go."

She did not seem to hear him, but broke out panting as soon as she could get her breath.

"My brothers listen to forked words!" she cried,

" and the spirit of lies has blinded them, so that they cannot see the truth. They are deceived by much lying because it is mingled with the truth, like tobacco and willow bark. He says he has been on the long war trail and now returns to his brothers with the ponies of his enemies. The trail has indeed been long, for it is many moons since he took the ponies. How long has he been rich?" she cried. "Many moons! Are the trails closed that he could not find his brothers before, while they were starving? Does he find them now because he calls to them from afar on the war trail? It is lies!

"And my brothers forget," she went on contemptuously, "the Yellow Hair of the Hills and the little child. What was it this one demanded of my brothers? To defile Pah-sap-pa by the slaying of his enemies. It was for that he made us rich, for that he used his craft to bring us power. It was *his* power. And when he led my brothers up into Pah-sap-pa, the voice of Gitche Manitou spoke to them and they went away leaving this one's enemies unharmed, and so he was angry with my brothers and swore to do them an injury. So he killed Buffalo Voice and defiled the totem in order that Gitche Manitou might turn his hand against us! He speaks forked words. Why has he not brought his gifts long before, if what I say is not true? There has been need."

She turned as suddenly as she had come and left the circle, again empty except for the leaping fire. In her spoke the spirit of relentlessness, a deserted woman. She touched with unerring instinct on the one weak spot in Lafond's defence, and thereby discredited the rest. Her reminder of the soreness of their need, when

this renegade brother had held out no hand to help them, hardened their hearts and brushed from their minds like cobwebs the structure of confidence which Lafond had so laboriously spun. Without one dissenting voice they condemned him to death. Then the sitting arose.

The hags of the camp advanced and stripped the half-breed naked, in spite of his frantic struggles. They were as strong as men, and they were glad he struggled because that indicated cowardice. Lafond was badly unnerved; his blood was partly Latin and his consciousness of innocence was keen. When he went into a thing with his eyes open, he was ready to take all the consequences with stoicism, should luck turn against him; but a feeling of guiltlessness was unusual enough to render him desperate when unjustly condemned. So he made a pitiful spectacle of himself.

The old hags jeered him. They told him he had a chicken's heart, and promised themselves the pleasure of tasting it after it was torn from his living body. They spat in his face and pinched his arms to see him wince. When he was stripped quite naked, they staked him out to picket pins with rawhide bands, one to each of his four limbs.

While this was going on, the warriors, having thrown aside their blankets, appeared in the full lithe glory of their naked bodies. To the accompaniment of a strange minor chant, they circled slowly around the fire and their victim, hopping rhythmically first on one foot then on the other, stepping high, stooping low. As they passed the prostrate man, they struck their knives deep into the ground near his head, for the purpose of seeing him shrink. After a little, they

became sufficiently excited, and so the tortures began.

Toward morning the squaws wrapped in a blanket the mutilated burnt carcass, and laid it on a litter which had been preparing while the torture was in progress. The litter was raised in the air to the height of ten feet, bound securely to upright poles. Man-who-speaks-Medicine had been a member of the tribe. Whatever his sins, he must have a tribal burial.

Then in the grayness of the dawn the little cavalcade filed away, like muffled phantoms, toward the east. In the sky the last stars were flickering out. On the hill top the last embers of the fire died. A bird high in the heavens piped up clearly for a moment, and was still. The breeze of morning rippled over the faintly distinguished grasses, and stirred the drying leaves of the litter that stood like a scaffold against the sombre shadows of the Hills.

THE END.

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